THE POETIC DEVELOPMENT OF HUGH MACDIARMID (CHRISTOPHER MURRAY GRIEVE): 1923-34.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid in the earlier part of his life and places special emphasis on his development in relation to his historical context. After outlining biographical details, MacDiarmid's earliest literary and political interests are set out. Attention is then paid to a periodical which had a singular influence on the poet -- The New Age. MacDiarmid's own periodical, The Scottish Chapbook, is examined in the light of his vernacular revival. His aesthetic of antithesis, "The Caledonian Antisyzygy", is looked at in relation to his Scots lyrics, as is the influence of the ballad form and contemporary literary movements.

MacDiarmid's interpretation of historical process as the product of antithetical forces, described in Nietzschean terms as the opposition of Apollo and Dionysos, is seen as the foundation of his belief in cultural renaissance. His model of regeneration, derived from Russia and influenced by the ideas of Soloviev and Dostoevsky, is outlined as "The Russo-Scottish Parallelism". The lyric sequence, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, is read in the light of the foregoing and the nature of its symbolism is explored.

The political interests of MacDiarmid are then studied and an attempt made to place both his involvement with Scottish Nationalism and his move to Communism in their context. A short sketch of the development and principles of Marx and Engels's dialectical materialism is set out in order that MacDiarmid's interpretation of their intellectual stance can be seen from the perspective of his developing a poetry of the "dialectic".

MacDiarmid's need to effect a synthesis between poetry and science, which was part of his attraction to the philosophy of Soloviev, is related to two poets whom he saw as having successfully incorporated the empirical strengths and vocabulary of science into their work -- Charles M. Doughty and John Davidson. Developing his scientific view in accordance with modern physics, MacDiarmid attempted to integrate Einstein's physics with a metaphysical understanding of the universe, undertaking in poetry what Alfred North Whitehead had been concerned to do in his "philosophy of organism". Finally, this understanding is brought to bear on a reading of On a Raised Beach, which is seen as a modern statement of the tragic sense, a work unique in modern poetry, and the greatest of MacDiarmid's achievements.

ABBREVIATIONS

C.P. The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid. Used throughout as the standard text.

L.P. Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas, being the Autobiography of Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve).

N.A. The New Age

O.E.D. The Oxford English Dictionary.

S.C. The Scottish Chapbook.

S.E. Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid.

Unless otherwise indicated English equivalents of Scots words are taken from the glossary of The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid.

As there is no standardization of Russian names in English, the policy adopted throughout has been to use a commonly anglicized form in discussion, but where quotation is required, the original spelling has been retained.

INTRODUCTION

The work of Hugh MacDiarmid has been slow to receive critical acclaim. There are several reasons for this neglect. Firstly, MacDiarmid's early work, written as it was in Scots vernacular, not only had a limited appeal to the reading public at large, but its excellence and originality was missed by the majority of literary critics and academics of his day. Secondly, MacDiarmid was always a man of extreme, but rarely consistent, opinions. He did not compromise easily and courted controversy, even to the extent of openly attacking leaders of literary, intellectual and publishing institutions, a stance unlikely to help him promote his own work. Thirdly, it is only in recent times that his work has become available in anything like a form which reveals the breadth of his abilities and interests, that is, with the publication of the two volume, The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid (1978).

This edition has laid the foundation for a more appropriate and scholarly examination of MacDiarmid's work and attempting to build on that effort, I have been concerned in this study to emphasize the intellectual and eclectic quality of MacDiarmid's work. This is a necessary corrective to the tendency, on the one hand, to see him as a brilliant but isolated parochial poet, and, on the other, to dismiss his use of themes and images as nothing more than a magpie instinct to horde any snippet of literary or scientific information which happened to attract him. By tracing MacDiarmid's early development, I have attempted to demonstrate the character and quality of his major influences and have located many of these in The New Age, a journal he was involved with both as subscriber and contributor from his early formative years through to his maturity. Such a close involvement with this periodical and some of the people responsible for its success, was to leave MacDiarmid open to a flood of ideas on art and science in a

period which was to witness the greatest explosion of knowledge in human history. MacDiarmid's attempt to synthesize this knowledge into his poetry is nothing less than heroic, and while in his work after the nineteen thirties, the increased specialization of knowledge which took place, made his task impossible, the early works represent a definite striving toward integrating a universe from which the idea of certainty in any field of endeavour was about to vanish.

A large part of the direct appeal of MacDiarmid's poetry is that in a period characterized by alienation, enervation and despair, his work is free of such debilitating self-pity and has an optimism and raw energy which is a fresh and striking contrast to the bleakness of much of the work of the modern period. Part of this attitude of MacDiarmid's can be attributed to the fact that he not only had the good fortune to grow up in a stable, self-sufficient and closely integrated community, in a part of Scotland which was relatively free of hardship, but he also lived in a time in which the ideals of the newly-emerging Socialism could give him a positive direction. He was fortunate too in that this direction had the support of his parents and a schoolmaster who had a great influence on him, George Ogilvie, and was also fired by the contact he had with some of the outstanding home-grown political leaders of his day, like Keir Hardie and John MacLean. MacDiarmid's commitment to Socialism was given further impetus by his interest in Russian culture, an interest which was also part of a more general cultural mood in Britain, particularly after the translations of Dostoevsky's works in 1912, and from the arrival in Britain of a whole group of outstanding Russian artists. This focus on the life and times of Russia channelled MacDiarmid's interest into new developments in Russian literature and he found in the poetry and philosophy of modern Russian writing, psychological and technical affinities which were to influence his thought and style.

MacDiarmid has been much criticized for abandoning his early work in Scots, but he did in fact continue to write in the vernacular throughout his life. There is, however, in his work of the early thirties an increasing Anglicization which is related both to his need to find a wider audience and to be free to develop in different directions. The Hymns to Lenin show this process most clearly, and their success lies in MacDiarmid having evolved a declamatory style which gives strength and feeling to the ideals of Communism, while at the same time retaining the simplicity of direct and intimate speech. MacDiarmid spoke out of a working class background which gives an added authenticity to his political poetry, for it never degenerates into the patronizing and authoritarian tone he so much despised in the works of Auden, Spender and Day Lewis.

The inability to find either the public acclaim that he so obviously desired in the thirties, or any kind of employment in literary circles, together with the break-up of his first marriage, created the major crisis of MacDiarmid's life, and was what led him to retreat to the isolation of Whalsay. There he was confronted by a landscape so completely the antithesis of his verdant Langholm that its initial effect on him was disturbing. The barren rocks of Shetland were to MacDiarmid a reminder of his own isolation and failure, yet, he surmounted his situation by fusing these two elements and emerged with renewed belief in the significance and purpose of his own life and the life of humanity in general, the resolution which found expression in On a Raised Beach.

I have limited this study of MacDiarmid's poetry from his early work to the publication of Stony Limits in 1934, not because the later work is not important or interesting, but from the realization that in order to do justice to his later work, what is required is a study as extensive as the present one. The work of MacDiarmid, as I hope this study will help to demonstrate, needs to be considered more seriously before the originality of his work can take the place it deserves in the fore of modern poetry.

PART ONE: BEGINNING

Chapter One

Early Life

The biographical details of MacDiarmid's early life are now commonplace, but bear retelling because of their significant relation to his intellectual and aesthetic development. Born Christopher Murray Grieve in 1892 in Langholm, a small border town not far from the birthplace of Carlyle, MacDiarmid's childhood seems to have been almost idyllic. His father was headpostmaster of the town, a responsible and well paid job, which ensured that the family while never rich had a comfortable life. MacDiarmid's mother was a local girl whom his father met and courted while delivering the post. The extended family had for several generations been workers in the local tweed mills which still flourish as the main industry of the area and some of MacDiarmid's relatives continue to live and work in the town.

The name Grieve is a very old Scottish name, first recorded in 1296 when a Johan Greve of Haytoune, Berwickshire, is cited as having rendered homage to the king.[1] The name itself means bailiff or overseer,[2] but there was one among MacDiarmid's ancestors who had literary ability. John Grieve was born in Dunfermline in 1781 and was a minor poet who wrote mainly ballads.[3] A close friend of James Hogg, author of Confessions of a Justified Sinner, his "Mador of the Moor" is dedicated to him.[4]

MacDiarmid's birthplace has not changed a great deal since he grew up there and the surrounding countryside is still beautiful and unspoiled. Situated on the side of one of the soft, green rolling hills where the river Esk meets its tributaries, the town overlooks

[1] George F. Black, The Surnames of Scotland: Their Origin, Meaning, and History (New York: New York Public Library, 1946), p.329.

[2] Black, p.329.

[3] Joseph Irving, The Book of Scotsmen (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1881), p.186.

[4] Irving, p.186.

a valley neat with pasture land beyond which are wide peat moorlands and hillocks which in MacDiarmid's day were wooded with hazelnut trees. Rich in custom, tradition and a folklore replete with stories of the trials of witches, the town has an expressive vocabulary for its local place names, many of which were to be incorporated directly into MacDiarmid's poetry. The sheer abundance of life experienced by MacDiarmid in this rich Border countryside was recalled by him in his autobiography. He wrote,

> Scotland is not generally regarded as a land flowing with milk and honey ... Nevertheless, it can do so at times, and probably does so far more frequently than is commonly understood. It certainly did so in my boyhood with a bountifulness so inexhaustible that it has supplied all my subsequent poetry with a tremendous wealth of sensuous satisfaction, a teeming gratitude of reminiscence, and that I have still an immense reservoir to draw upon. My earliest impressions are of an almost tropical luxuriance of Nature - of great forests, of honey-scented heather hills, and moorlands infinitely rich in little-appreciated beauties of flowering, of animal and insect life, of strange and subtle relationships of water and light... (L.P., p.219).

The rural life MacDiarmid knew as a child in Langholm was described as "raw, vigorous, rich, bawdy and simply bursting with life", a description which can be aptly applied to the poetry he was to produce out of that experience.(L.P., p.6)

MacDiarmid's memories of his childhood would suggest that he had an almost limitless freedom as a boy, yet he had a strict religious upbringing. His parents were Free Presbyterians and his father was superintendent of the local Sunday school. MacDiarmid himself won several prizes for his Bible knowledge and like his father was to teach Bible classes. Despite his later dismissal of the more dogmatic elements of religious

belief, MacDiarmid was not unaffected by his background and his religious sense emerges in his poetry in a variety of interesting ways. Similarly, the strong commitment which his parents had to the Trade Union movement left their mark on MacDiarmid and he himself claimed that the extremity of his own political views stemmed from the fact that as a child he grew up in an environment of "out-and-out Radicalism and Republicanism" ("The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid").[5]

These two streams, the political and the religious, often merge in MacDiarmid's writing. For example, in "A Solitary Wing" from Annals of the Five Senses, MacDiarmid's first published work, the speaker envisions a future in which there will be,

> New kingdoms of the spirit set far above the aspirations of the politicians, beyond all the projects of social betterment, a republic of souls in which, above mere right and sordid utility, above beauty, devotion, holiness, heroism and enthusiasm, the Infinite would have a worship and an abiding city (p.191-2).

Here the ideal of a higher spiritual reality is expressed in evangelical language -- "New kingdoms of the spirit", "the Infinite would have a worship and abiding city" -- but the conclusion of the paragraph emphasizes the priority of first achieving practical social change,

> But ... it would be essential to eliminate all such suffering and iniquity as is preventible and germane in defective social arrangements, before it would be possible to return to spiritual goods (p.192).

MacDiarmid received his early education at the town school where one of his masters, Francis George Scott, was later to become his close friend, and was to set many of his Scots lyrics to music. A local minister, T.S. Cairncross, who wrote poetry in Scots and had a good knowledge of the native literary tradition as

[5]Published as "Arthur Leslie" in pamphlet form (Glasgow: Caledonia Press, 1952) and reprinted in S.E., pp.19-37.

well as an extensive library, was also close to the young poet. The MacDiarmid family lived in the Post Office building, the top half of which was the Langholm Library, a private library set up in 1800 by a number of the townspeople and supported by their subscriptions.[6] In 1834, the library received an endowment from Thomas Telford, engineer and builder of bridges and canals, and an archetypal local son made good, which enabled the library to increase its holdings and which has made it of interest in its own right as a nineteenth-century rural library. The catalogue of the library has been preserved and the books listed provide some indication of MacDiarmid's earliest reading, for living immediately below the library, he was one of its most frequent visitors, and claimed to have read his way through most of the books before he left Langholm.

The first catalogue is dated 1864, with supplements added in 1900, 1902 and 1903, and all list a number of Grieves among the members. The collection as a whole reflects nineteenth-century interests, but with some interesting additions. Travel books by the better known of the Empire builders are there in abundance: Burton's Arabia: Pilgrimage to Medinah and Meccah, Mungo Park's Travels in Africa, Bruce's Travels to the Source of the Nile, are but a few examples. There is an unusually high proportion of works dealing with North America, Bancroft's History of the U.S.A., Ramsay's History of the American Revolution, and many more, which is complemented by a good representation of American literature -- Emerson, James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Washington Irving, and so on. Interestingly, there are several works on the life and times of a country which at the end of the nineteenth century was still largely unknown to the rest of Europe -- Russia -- and among these is one by J.Y. Simpson, Side-lights on Siberia, whose interest in Russian culture and ideas on theology

[6] Langholm Library, Regulations and Catalogue, 1864. Supplementary Catalogues, 1900, 1902 and 1903.

MacDiarmid was to make use of in an early and important essay, "A Russo-Scottish Parallelism" (1923).

Works dealing with scientific subjects are a predominant part of this collection. Darwin and Malthus' works are there together with related works like Kirby's Habits and Instincts of Animals and Roget's Animal and Vegetable Physiology. Lyell's Principles of Geology is accompanied by such titles as James Nicols' A Manual of Mineralogy, The Geology of Scotland and Owen's Treatise on Palaeontology. There is an astonishing number of titles dealing with astronomy, including Chalmers' Astronomical Discourses, Arago's On Comets and Whewell's Astronomy and Physics.

Max Muller's Lectures on Language is in this collection as is the work MacDiarmid was later to use as a source of his Scots lyrics, Jamieson's Dictionary of the Scottish Language. History, philosophy and classical literature are well represented together with major works of the English tradition and a large collection of the works of the Romantic poets. Contemporary writers include Meredith, Kipling, Rider Haggard, Wells, Conrad and Hardy. There is some literature in translation -- Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Madame de Stael, Schiller, Goethe, Zola and Ibsen and, surprisingly, Merezhkovsky's Christ and Anti-Christ. Scottish literature has not been neglected; Scott, Galt, Burns and Stevenson predominate, but there are a host of works by minor writers and the traditional interest of the Borders in its own form, the ballad, is reflected in titles such as Child's Ballads of Scotland and England, Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border and Aytoun's Ballads of Scotland. Nineteenth-century periodicals are a prominent feature of this collection which includes Blackwood's, The Athenaeum, Chambers' Journal, The Cornhill Magazine, The Edinburgh Review, Quiver, Century, Strand, Contemporary Review, Longman's Magazine, and a good number more.

If MacDiarmid's assertion that he was familiar with almost every volume in the collection is true, then he was certainly introduced at a

formative age to a broad range of scientific, cultural and literary interests, and even if his claim is exaggerated, what reading he did do from the Langholm Library obviously gave to him a distinct taste for the eclectic.

MacDiarmid's parents encouraged their children's educational interests, for MacDiarmid was to take advantage of the system of secondary education which, as a result of the late nineteenth-century Educational Acts, came into being in his day. The compulsory age for leaving school had, in 1901, been extended to fourteen years, and there evolved a four-year higher programme offering studies in English, History, Geography, Mathematics, Drawing, Science and Modern Languages, which was meant to serve as a base for extended study in vocational training areas, like teaching, which because of the enlargement of the educational system on a national level had itself become a prime area of employment.[7]

It was towards teaching that MacDiarmid was initially directed and from 1908 to 1910 he attended Broughton Junior Students' Centre in Edinburgh, in preparation for teacher training. At Broughton, MacDiarmid was to meet a man who had a marked influence on his life and with whom he corresponded regularly for many years -- George Ogilvie. The MacDiarmid/Ogilvie letters span the years from 1911 to 1928, that is, the period in which MacDiarmid completed his formal education, began adult life and wrote several major works, until a short time before the death of Ogilvie.[8]

Collectively, the letters represent a most remarkable record of the young poet's literary and political interests. Stylistically, they are a complete contrast to his published prose. While MacDiarmid's prose works have been justly criticized for their congested style, their overuse of obscure scientific and literary allusions, and a bombastic and posturing tone which MacDiarmid was to adopt later in life as a public stance, the letters reveal the many sides of the man in a more direct and guileless manner, conveyed in language which is for the most part simple and straightforward, yet charged with an almost superhuman energy.

[7] J. Strong, A History of Secondary Education in Scotland (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), pp.258-274.

[8] The C.M. Grieve/George Ogilvie Correspondence, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 4540. Hereafter the letters are identified by date.

It is in his letters to Ogilvie that the subtler sides of MacDiarmid's personality come through. In the courtesies and the concerns he expresses for Ogilvie and his family, the young MacDiarmid reveals himself as a not ungentle man. Present too in the letters is a refreshing vulnerability, for as a young man MacDiarmid was plagued with self-doubt, doubt which is however offset by an optimism and ebullience which he seems to have been able to assert even in the face of major setbacks.

The earliest letter to Ogilvie was written in 1911, the year of the death of the poet's father. To Ogilvie, MacDiarmid confided, "I look back to you as I look back to my dead father",[9] and it is clear that his old schoolmaster was to act as both surrogate father and mentor to the young MacDiarmid. Throughout the correspondence MacDiarmid repeats constantly to Ogilvie that he will one day produce work which will fulfil the promise Ogilvie had recognized in his literary abilities and it seems to have been taken for granted by both of them that MacDiarmid would commit himself to a life of writing. It was Ogilvie who was to advise and criticize MacDiarmid's early work, and one of MacDiarmid's first poems, "A Moment in Eternity", is dedicated to Ogilvie.

Ogilvie was a socialist and would therefore have been sympathetic to MacDiarmid's own political background and his adolescent activities in the political sphere. MacDiarmid wrote that when he first went to Edinburgh from Langholm he joined the I.L.P. and the Fabian Society, and produced for the latter memoranda dealing with agricultural problems in Scotland.[10] This was to be the first of many political pamphlets

[9]The letter is undated but internal evidence suggests it was written in the autumn of 1911.

[10]"The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid" in S.E., p.21.

and articles MacDiarmid, under a variety of pseudonyms, was to write in his lifetime.

In Edinburgh, possibly because of the death of his father, MacDiarmid abandoned his plans for a career in teaching and turned to journalism instead, working initially on some local papers before moving to Wales to take up a job as junior reporter there. MacDiarmid's accounts of his journalistic career are well documented in the letters to Ogilvie, and it is evident that he found the excitement and camaraderie of a reporter's life much to his liking. When he arrived in Wales, MacDiarmid wrote to Ogilvie telling him that he was working for the Monmouthshire Labour News and gave to him an account of his coverage of and participation in the miners' riots in South Wales. MacDiarmid announced that he was,

> Forging ahead aye! I have already been instrumental in forming four new branches of the I.L.P. down here. In Credefar a policeman took my name and address on the grounds that it was illegal to speak off the top of a soap-box.
>
> I asked him if a match-box was within the meaning of the act and he put something else down in his note-book: what I do not know.
>
> However, as a branch of 25 members was the outcome I can afford to be generous.
>
> Did you see any account of the recent pogroms in Bargoed, Tredegar, Rhymney, Ebbw Vale and Cum? They gave me my first taste of war corresponding: and I narrowly escaped being bludgeoned more than once: I heard the Riot Act read thrice in one night (in different towns, of course) and saw seventeen baton charges. My attack on the police, for their conduct during these riots, sent up the sale of the papers considerably...
>
> (20 Oct., 1911).

Despite the relish MacDiarmid obviously derived from being in the heat of battle, this kind of observation of the handling of civil unrest, unrest caused by unalleviated poor social conditions, gave to him no love of established authority, but placed him even more firmly on the side of radical socialist causes.

It was while he was living in Wales that MacDiarmid claimed that he used to meet and talk with Keir Hardie who was then Member of Parliament for South Wales. Later, back in Scotland, MacDiarmid was to form friendships with two other famous socialist activists, John MacLean and James Maxton. MacLean in particular was to become to MacDiarmid a symbol of the spirit Scotland needed, "a flash of sun in a country all prison-grey" ("John MacLean"). A revolutionary who had set out to educate the working class about the principles of Communism, talking of freedom as the recognition of necessity two decades before the movement became a widespread political and intellectual force in the rest of Britain, MacLean came to be regarded by many on "Red Clydeside" as a political martyr, a man physically broken by long terms of unjust imprisonment.[11]

With the outbreak of war in 1914, MacDiarmid enlisted and served with the R.A.M.C. in Greece, Italy and France. The letters which MacDiarmid wrote to Ogilvie during this period of his war service are long and self-exploratory, often giving biographical details of his activities before he joined the army. It is clear from these letters that MacDiarmid had long since broken with his Presbyterian background, but was, nevertheless, still interested in other forms of religious belief, indeed, throughout his life, MacDiarmid's quest for an all-embracing philosophy is symptomatic of a deep-rooted desire to find a substitute for lost religious faith. In 1918, MacDiarmid wrote to Ogilvie telling him that he had completed a series of "Scots Church Essays", dealing, not as would be expected, with the religion of his parents, but with Catholicism. MacDiarmid listed some of his titles,

> 'The Calibre of Modern Scottish Priests' (Contrast with America where vide Monsignor Benson, 'Catholicism is the only living religion'.)

[11] Nan Milton, John MacLean (London: Pluto, 1973), pp.11-13. John MacLean (1879-1923) was a Glasgow schoolteacher who became a dedicated Communist. He spoke publicly all over Scotland during the First World War. He denounced the war as an act of Imperial aggression and was imprisoned for sedition. After the Russian Revolution he was appointed Bolshevik Consul in Glasgow and was, together with Lenin and Trotsky, Honorary President of the First All Russian Congress of Soviets.

'Neo-Catholicism's debt to Sir Walter Scott'. (This completed - based on Newman's and Borrow's acknowledgements.)

'The Indisseverable Association' (i.e. of Catholicism in Scotland - like bells of Ys, Placenames, social functions, sacraments, etc. etc. (This also completed)

The first series of these 'studies' runs to 50. So does the second embracing,

'The Religion of Wallace and Bruce' (and all great figures of Scottish history - the religion which makes the true atmosphere of Scottish history. Who shall put Peden beside Bonnie Prince Charlie, Fanny Geddes[12] beside Queen Margaret? etc)... (20 August, 1916).

The titles suggest that MacDiarmid was intent on re-establishing Scotland's Roman Catholic roots and there is little question that he found the idea of mediaeval Scotland as a place informed by a religious vision which linked it culturally and intellectually to the rest of the civilized world, a most attractive one. However, in the same letter, MacDiarmid reveals to Ogilvie some of his difficulties in wholeheartedly accepting Catholicism. He wrote,

> Of my progress through the pit of Atheism to Roman Catholicism (adherent not member of the Church of Rome - I doubt my faiths and doubt my doubts of my faith too subtly to take the final step but at this house by the wayside am content meanwhile) ... I have said nothing.

This lack of ability to commit himself totally to one sole view of things also extends, MacDiarmid explained to Ogilvie, to his political interests, for he adds that this concern with Catholicism has run a course similar to that of his political stance, which had gone from "Labourism through Anarchy to a form of Toryism". Despite these drawbacks and uncertainties, MacDiarmid concluded the letter by

[12]In referring to "Fanny Geddes", MacDiarmid probably meant Jenny Geddes, the character reputed to have started a riot in St. Giles Cathedral in 1637 when it was proposed that a new prayer book be introduced.

telling Ogilvie that he planned to "come back and start a new Neo-Catholic movement" and also "enter heart and body and soul into a new Scots Nationalist propaganda". The former never materialized, but the latter was to become for MacDiarmid a way of fusing literary and political interests into a single and significant direction.

Ultimately, MacDiarmid's move was away from his early interest in Catholicism to Communism and what is clear is that the attraction these two systems held for him was not dissimilar. Catholicism in its most authentic form had in its day realized a world spirit which had bound man to man in a sense of shared purpose. Despite the historical factions it had known, Catholicism had once been a unifying and ennobling energy. Communism had as its ideal an international brotherhood of workers which would one day establish a universal proletarian society based on need and sharing. Marx dismissed religion as a corrupting and stifling force, but what he advocated was a vision informed by the same principles which had once made Christianity a great and civilizing force.

MacDiarmid was keenly aware of the principles of Communism at this stage in his life, for he wrote to Ogilvie that, as with his "Scots Church Essays", he had been extensively investigating Communism and had now completed

> ... a 20,000 word 'book' on 'The Soviet State' comprising 1/ A Preface. 2/ A Selected Bibliography. 3/ An account of the present situation in Russia and the Allied attitude thereto. 4/ A Discussion of the Old Regime and the causes of the Revolution. 5/ An account of the development of the Revolution through the Duma Provisional Govt. to the present Soviet Republic. 6/ A detailed description of the actual machinery of Bolshevik government... (23 March, 1919).

This book was never published, so while it is obvious that MacDiarmid's knowledge of the Russian Communist State was fairly wide, it is a great

deal more difficult to gauge the precise nature of his feeling for the movement, for it was not until much later in his life, in the early 1930's, by which time Communism was a popular intellectual and social force, that MacDiarmid became a member of the Party. The possibility which seems most likely is that MacDiarmid's sympathies for the ideals of Communism were waylaid by the role he was to play in the drive for national independence for Scotland, which movement was always to come into conflict with his later commitment to Communism.

Few of MacDiarmid's letters to Ogilvie describe his personal reaction to the war, for, as he explained, censorship made it pointless to do so. However, by November 1918 it was safe to comment and MacDiarmid replied to Ogilvie's celebration of victory in the following terms,

> I was greatly interested in what you say of the termination of hostilities and the future you forecast. I myself believe that we have lost this war - in everything but actuality! When I see scores of sheep go to a slaughter house I do not feel constrained to admire their resignation. Nor do I believe that the majority of soldiers killed were sufficiently actuated by ideals or capable of entertaining ideas to justify such terms as 'supreme self-sacrifice', etc. I have been oppressed by my perception of the wide spread automatism - fortuity - of these great movements and holocausts.... So with 'patriotism' - a 'war of ideas' -'democracy versus autocracy' etc. I more and more incline to the belief that human intelligence is a mere by-product of little account - that the purpose and testing of the human race is something quite apart from it - that religion, civilisation and so on are mere 'trimmings' irrelevant to the central issues... (24 Nov., 1918).

As it was for so many others, the war was a great disillusion for MacDiarmid and he condemned outright anything which smacked of "supreme self-sacrifice" as nothing but human waste. But, interestingly,

this letter reveals a pattern of thought which was to recur in MacDiarmid's creative work, and is one which is essentially antithetical.

On the one hand, MacDiarmid's attitude to the war is deeply deterministic. The war has been "outside the march of progress", that is, the belief in man's ability to civilize and perfect his existence which had been a pre-war ideal, has been destroyed by a conflict which is now seen to have been utterly useless. Similarly, the sense which accompanied that ideal of progress, that of man playing the significant role in some ultimate order, no longer holds, for MacDiarmid feels that whatever order does exist in historical movement is beyond human understanding and insusceptible to human direction. Those ideals which had seemed to give order to life -- "religion" and "civilisation" -- are regarded by him as something outside of the real "purpose and testing of the human race". Yet, MacDiarmid, despite this attitude of determinism, goes on to tell Ogilvie, that in times such as they are experiencing when faith in anything has become almost an impossibility, the only hope for the future is to do what "Matthew Arnold" had done and keep "aloof from what is called the practical view of things...." Adopting such a view, MacDiarmid explains, is the only way to gain "a vision of the mysterious Goddess, whom we shall never see except in outline but only thus even in outline". Against his sense of a determined reality, and the pessimism which is so often the accompaniment of such an outlook, MacDiarmid posits a mystical vision of the Absolute, a "mysterious Goddess", who can never be a direct part of experience, and is only approachable through the transcendental. There is more to be said on the origins of this Goddess in MacDiarmid's thought and work, but for the present suffice to emphasize that the two views he is putting forward --

the deterministic and the holistic -- are irreconcilable, yet it is the tension of these opposites which charges the best of MacDiarmid's work.

In addition to keeping Ogilvie informed of his intellectual concerns, MacDiarmid tended to list his current reading interests. The following is a representative selection of that reading,

> Gardiner's 'Prophets, Priests and Kings', Birrell's 'Selected Essays', R.L.'s[y] Familiar Studies of Men and Books',[13] assorted copies of the 'Nation', 'Spectator' and 'New Witness'... (20 August, 1916).
>
> Turgenev, Henry James, J.M. Synge, The Georgian Poets, Galsworthy's 'Fraternity', Gilbert Murray's Greek translations... (4 Dec., 1917).
>
> Paul Fort, the Sitwells, Rebecca West, Serge Asanoff, Remy de Goncourt,[14] (whose posthumous papers I am dying to read) Joyce Kilmur (an admirable appreciation of whose works I have just read in 'The Month') Theodore Maynard (quotation from whose 'Drums of Defeat' - and in extension his fine tribute to Padraic Pearse - I find in the latest Dublin 'Leader', the Sinn Fein paper) ... to hand ... Chesterton's 'Club of Queer Trades'. Alpha of the Plough's 'Pebbles on the Shore', E.V. Lucas' 'A Little of Everything', some 'English Reviews' containing stories by Caradoc Evans, some copies of 'Everyman' and of the 'Month' the 'Tablet' and 'The New York Saturday Post' and the 'Sydney Bulletin' and 'Life' and 'La Revue Franco-Macedoniene', and some 'National News' copies with instalments of Wells' 'Soul of a Bishop'... (14 Feb., 1918).

Obviously, MacDiarmid's reading did not diminish when he left Langholm, for the above indicates both his wide range of literary interests and suggests that much of his taste was being developed through that important transmitter of culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries -- the periodical.

[13] Robert Louis Stevenson.

[14] MacDiarmid was probably referring to Remy de Gourmont.

Raymond Williams has recorded that one of the effects of educational reform in Britain was the emergence of a greatly expanded reading public which, in turn, gave rise to an increased demand for journals and newspapers.[15] The growth of a public press was accompanied by smaller and more specialized journals directed towards literary and artistic interests.[16] The role these journals played in the formation of modernist aesthetics is crucial, because they provided a means of communication between artist and public over large geographical areas and thus influenced intellectual growth and the development of artistic skills, on a scale previously unknown and uncontemplated. The emergence of these journals was completely spontaneous, yet they succeeded in bringing together established writers and men-of-letters with the new "schooled" generations of MacDiarmid's age and before who were beginning to emerge in the early decades of this century as an identifiable group of thinkers outside of traditional centres of learning. To this latter group the literary journal was to offer not only artistic identification, but direct opportunities for the publication and serious consideration of their work.

Among the most frequently mentioned of literary periodicals in MacDiarmid's letters to Ogilvie is The New Age,[17] a journal which has received inadequate attention in relation to the significant role it played in the dissemination of ideas in the early modern period. N.A. was read by MacDiarmid almost from its inception and he had close links

[15] The Long Revolution (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p.170.

[16] Williams, p.170.

[17] Hereafter referred to as N.A.

with it right up until the early thirties.[18] An understanding of the growth and achievement of this periodical, as well as the part played by its editor, A.R. Orage, is necessary for a more informed appreciation of MacDiarmid's work, for such an understanding reveals how MacDiarmid relates to the crucial social and intellectual developments of his time and place.

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[18] The Company I've Kept: Essays in Autobiography (London: Hutchinson, 1966), p.77. MacDiarmid wrote that he read N.A. from "1908 onwards" and later was "a regular contributor". For the idea that N.A. was the source of much of MacDiarmid's ideas and material, I am also indebted to Roderick Watson's unpublished thesis, "A Critical Study of the 'Cencrastus theme' in the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid," Diss. Cambridge, 1970.

Chapter Two

A.R.Orage and 'The New Age'

MacDiarmid wrote that he was,

> ... put in touch with 'The New Age' and its author A.R. Orage when I was still at school by a very remarkable schoolmaster George Ogilvie. I still think it is the most brilliant journal that has ever been written in English ... it reached all the liveliest minds in Great Britain and further afield (The Company I've Kept, p.271).

The high esteem in which MacDiarmid held this periodical is borne out both in the influence it exerted upon him and in his own association with Orage and N.A. The importance of the journal is that because it saw itself as addressing a European as opposed to a strictly British readership and was therefore prepared to entertain and publicize the works of foreign authors, it emerged in the vanguard of movements which were to shape modern sensibility.

The periodical was originally founded in 1894 and was initially sympathetic to Liberal policy, but with the rapid growth of Socialism became part of that movement, re-subtitling itself in 1895, "A Journal for Thinkers and Workers".[1] Although successful in its early days, N.A. went through a financial crisis which, in 1907, forced its selling. In that year the periodical was taken over by Arthur Richard Orage and Holbrook Jackson both of whom were committed socialists who aimed to promote a new cohesiveness for the movement by providing in the periodical a platform for discussion and debate. Socialism, before it coalesced into a political party, was to be found in association with a number of groups of different but related ideologies. With its ideals of brotherhood and unity, Socialism attracted those looking for a replacement for lost religious belief, as well as those dedicated to altering the inequalities of the class system. A fascination with such

[1] Wallace Martin, 'The New Age' under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History (Manchester: University Press, 1967), pp.23-4.

esoteric interests as Eastern philosophy, hermeticism, myth and mediaevalism was a reaction to the pessimism brought on by nineteenth-century scientific determinism, and these were looked to as a possible source of a new spiritual unity.[2] Socialism's vision of a homogeneous social community flourished in conjunction with groups like Blavatsky's Theosophists,[3] a society which for many leading intellectuals (among them Yeats) seemed to offer, through the emphasis Theosophy placed on the qualitative aspects of life, a more meaningful association than that of the Fabians, who in their schemes for the redeployment of the country's resources were accused of having overlooked the more spiritual needs.

In the period from the 1890's to the outbreak of the Great War, in that vacuum left by the loss of religion as the guiding principle of life, before the theories of Freud and Jung became widely accepted as the new explanation of mind, it was not unusual to find well-informed individuals holding to the creeds of Fabianism and Theosophy at the same time, seeing no contradiction in their stance.[4] Among

[2]John A. Lester, Journey Through Despair: 1880-1914 (Princeton: University Press, 1968), pp.92-4.

[3]Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. XII, "Theosophical Society", pp.300-304 and "Theosophy" pp.304-315. Helene Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) was reputed to be a Russian noblewoman who had been trained by an Eastern occultist. The movement was founded in New York in 1875 and it outlined its ideals as,"To form the universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man...." It was this last "scientific" investigation of superphysical events which brought the movement into disrepute and led to Blavatsky being exposed as a fraud.

[4]John Carswell, Lives and Letters: 1906-57 (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.20. Commenting on the interconnections between Socialism and Theosophy, Carswell writes, "Socialism had not yet established itself as a faith in its own right, and the great explanations of psychology were still to come. The gigantic and pervasive forces of organized religion were still able to demand that even those who rejected their doctrines and disciplines ... should formulate some other supernatural synthesis; so socialism was not uncommonly found in association with Theosophy".

such was Orage, whose retrospective commentary on his own involvement with the two groups, provides some understanding as to why such interchange was common. In those years, Orage wrote, Socialism was a "cult" with

> ... affiliations in directions now quite disowned - with theosophy, arts and crafts, vegetarianism, the 'simple life' and almost one might say, with the musical glasses. Morris had shed a mediaeval glamour over it with his stained-glass News from Nowhere. Edward Carpenter had put it into sandals, Cunninghame Graham had mounted it upon an Arab steed to which he was always saying a romantic farewell. Keir Hardie had clothed it in a cloth cap and red tie. And Bernard Shaw, on behalf of the Fabian Society, had hung it with innumerable jingling epigrammatic bells - and cap. My brand of socialism was, therefore, a blend, or, let us say, an anthology of all of these, to which from my personal predilections and experience I added a good practical knowledge of the working classes, a professional interest in economics which led me to master Marx's Das Kapital and an idealism fed at the source - namely Plato.[5]

Of the two editors who took over N.A., Orage was the one who was to maintain an interest in the philosophical aspects of Socialism, for he worked consistently to establish a firmer foundation for the developing movement. In the last issue of the periodical in its old form, Orage, in a special commentary, made the point that the function of the journal would be to bring the different strands of Socialism together. He wrote, "Nothing is more evident today than the fact of divergence amongst leading reformers on precisely the higher issues of the Socialist propaganda. To bring these divergencies into the light of intelligence, to give expression to the as yet inarticulate hopes and fears of our best minds will be the aim of 'The New Age' in its new form" (N.A., 25 April, 1907, p.458).

The first issue of the journal under Orage and Jackson's editorship described itself as an "Independent Review of Politics, Literature

[5]Philip Mairet, A.R. Orage: A Memoir (London: Dent, 1936), p.40. The source of Orage's comment is not identified by Mairet.

and Art" and declared that it would devote itself to acting as a corrective to a Socialism over-dependent upon materialistic goals. In the editorial, readers were cautioned that the periodical was not about to become the organ of any political party or movement, but was dedicated to examining "the questions of the day in the light of the new Social Ideal; an ideal which has owed as much to the aristocracy of Plato, the individualism of Ibsen and Goethe, the metaphysics of Schopenhauer, the idealism of William Morris and the aestheticism of Ruskin, as to the democracy of Whitman and Carpenter" (N.A., 2 May, 1907). While the tone set was that of a radical periodical, N.A. was in fact very much dedicated, as the preceding comments indicate, to building on traditional human ideals, particularly to carrying on the attacks on industrial society which had been the forte of Victorian critics. The emphasis was, however, on forward-looking directions, and the intent of the editors was to develop an unbiased approach towards artistic and political questions, a policy which was in fact maintained during the period that Orage was editor.

An authoritative biography has yet to be written about Orage, but an increasing importance is being placed on the role he played both as editor and as literary critic in the early part of this century during the fifteen years from 1907 to 1922 when he was sole editor of N.A. Born at Fenstanton, a village near Cambridge, in 1873, Orage's early life followed a course which was to become the set pattern for bright children from a working class background who had access to an extended educational system.[6] Orage, like MacDiarmid, was the exceptional child of a country family whose

[6]The fullest accounts of Orage's life are to be found in Martin's 'The New Age' under Orage and in David Thatcher's chapter on Orage in Nietzsche in England: 1890-1914 (Toronto: University Press, 1970). Other biographical sources are, Philip Mairet, A.R. Orage a Memoir, Beatrice Hastings, The Old 'New Age' (London: Blue Moon Press, 1936), Paul Selver Orage and 'The New Age' Circle (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959) and John Carswell, Lives and Letters. Individual sources of information will be identified in context.

scholastic aptitudes were encouraged and, as with MacDiarmid, he was directed towards a career in teaching. Orage completed teacher training in 1893 and settled down for some years at a school in Leeds. In that same year, the I.L.P. was formed and Orage became a member, submitting articles to Keir Hardie's New Leader. It was during this period that Orage developed an interest in Theosophy, giving lectures on the subject which were later published as Consciousness: Animal, Human and Superman (1907), a work which was issued under the auspices of the Theosophical Publishing Society and which is essentially an attempt to synthesize the doctrines of Madame Blavatsky and Nietzsche. During his years in Leeds, Orage began reading Plato and formed a group to discuss philosophical questions. This group subsequently became the Leeds Arts Club and to it were invited leading artists, Socialists and Theosophists. Shaw, Wells, Yeats, G.K. Chesterton and Edward Carpenter, all gave lectures there and the ideas of Ibsen, Nietzsche and Blavatsky were the common currency.[7] The idea of the club was to shake the Leeds bourgeoisie into an awareness of new social, political and spiritual horizons, but, importantly, it brought Orage into contact with many of the leading writers of the day.[8]

By 1905, Orage had decided to try and establish himself as a journalist in London and worked free-lance there until 1907 when he and Holbrook Jackson took over N.A. The financial backing for the periodical was supplied by Shaw and a fellow Theosophist, Lewis Alexander Wallace, a Leeds banker. While, as has been pointed out, the first issue of the journal presented itself as politically unbiased, it did have a decidedly Fabian flavour due to the large number

[7]Philip Mairet, A.R. Orage: A Memoir, p.25. This is the most detailed account of Orage's life in Leeds and it outlines the setting-up of the Arts Club.

[8]David Thatcher, Nietzsche in England, p.226.

of good-luck letters from leading Fabians -- Sidney Webb, Granville-Barker and Wells -- which it published in its columns. However, this colouring was quickly corrected, for N.A. immediately launched an attack on the authoritarian Socialism of the Fabians, an attack which was fuelled by a series of articles by Hilaire Belloc, later published as The Servile State (1912). Belloc contended that economic freedom and Socialism were incompatible because Socialism, or as he referred to it, collectivism, simply made capitalism more endurable, without changing any of its inequalities. "The mass of men", wrote Belloc, "shall be constrained by law to labour to the profit of a minority, but as the price of such constraint, shall enjoy a security which the old capitalism did not give them" (p.112). The editorials of N.A. argued against any form of a centralized state and advocated a move from collectivism and industrialism to a form of society which would ensure individual right and dignity, arguments which were an extension of the ideals of Morris, Ruskin and Carlyle.[9] Like many that came after, this debate generated so much controversy that several important public writers of the day entered into it, thereby bringing to the periodical the weight of their more long-established reputations as well as the vigour of their ideas. Through such lively dispute Galsworthy, Anatole France, Havelock Ellis, Shaw, Wells and Chesterton began to appear regularly. Often Orage would deliberately engineer these debates, having the foresight to see that the best guarantee of freedom from political bias was to entertain such a divergent group of characters.

[9]Wallace Martin, 'The New Age' under Orage, pp.5-6. In this study of the influence of Orage and N.A., Martin comments that the editor was particularly concerned to restore the nineteenth-century tradition of concern for preserving human values in an increasingly mechanized state. He writes, "This tradition went back to Carlyle's bitter attack on industrialists who considered the payment of wages their only obligation to employees, to Ruskin's emphasis on social as opposed to material wealth, to William Morris and the mediaevalist reaction, with its opposition to industrialism and insistence on the importance of art in life. It was to these ideas that contributors to 'The New Age' turned in attempting to find an alternative to collectivism".

Orage developed topics for his journal through informal contact with writers. He would meet regularly at the Café Royal and certain Kardomah coffee houses and would invite writers who he knew were stimulating talkers, as well as people he felt were diametrically opposed on the important issues of the day. Through the years these meetings were attended by Yeats, A.E. (George Russell), Oliver St. John Gogarty, Augustus John, Janko Lavrin, Eliot, Philip Mairet, Jacob Epstein and many more who either came regularly or dropped by occasionally to observe or participate in the lively sessions.

Noted as a talent spotter, among Orage's early finds were Herbert Read, Edwin Muir and Katherine Mansfield, to be followed in later years by Dylan Thomas and MacDiarmid. Many writers whose names are now commonplace in the early history of modern literature were regular contributors to the periodical. T.E. Hulme, Pound and Wyndham Lewis were among those who figured prominently. Most of the new unknown writers were only too grateful to see their work in print and received little financial return for their efforts, which earned the periodical the title of the "No Wage".[10] Those who, like Muir, Pound, Read and Orage himself, were to appear regularly, wrote under a number of aliases, which was no doubt meant to convey the impression of the journal as a financially sound, well-staffed publication, instead of the precarious penny weekly it was in reality.

One of Orage's major successes was unquestionably this recognition and development of new literary talent. It was his practice to invite unknowns to write to him and upon receipt of their work he would send back, not the usual rejection slip, but a personal letter offering

[10]John Carswell, Lives and Letters, p.81. The non-payment of writers was not due to any lack of generosity on the part of Orage, but to the necessity of keeping the periodical going. Ezra Pound, writes Carswell, recalled that in his early years in London it was Orage who had "fed him".

substantial criticism and direction, as well as, for the more promising, the possibility of publication. Edwin Muir is only one of several who began his literary career in this manner, and he unstintingly acknowledged his great personal debt to Orage.[11]

As editor, Orage found a particularly suitable niche for himself and performed a valuable role in the recognition and promotion of the creative abilities of an entirely different group of writers who would have found it impossible to have their work taken seriously by the more established literary journals of the day. To such writers, N.A. was not simply a literary force but a social force as well, for it brought together like-minded spirits who could recognize in the similarity of their backgrounds and circumstances a real and viable alternative to university education -- to which few of this group had had access.[12]

[11] An Autobiography (London: Hogarth, 1968), p.126. Muir wrote that while he was living in Glasgow and felt himself close to a nervous breakdown he wrote to Orage, although he only knew of him because he "read him every week". Orage replied with a "long and kind letter describing his own intellectual struggles as a young man, and saying that he had been greatly helped by taking up some particular writer and studying everything he wrote until he felt he knew the workings of a great mind". Muir followed Orage's advice, developed a correspondence with him and sent his first poems to Orage who published them in N.A., followed in time by "We Moderns", a series of literary articles which helped establish Muir's reputation as a writer and led to his being appointed literary editor of N.A.

[12] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "Movements, Magazines and Manifestos: The Succession from Naturalism" in Modernism: 1880-1930, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp.192-205. In their assessment of the influence of literary periodicals on emerging writers in the period, the authors state that, "... it was the self-consciously small paper, in an era of large publishing ventures, that began to take over not only the localized work of particular movements but the larger tasks of cultural transmission. Such papers ...specialized and usually advanced in taste, disposed (often) to bring the various arts together, became the primary expressions of new talent. By the end of the nineteenth century such journals were a crucial part of the literary scene.... With greater or lesser degrees of commitment, they functioned as centres of aesthetic debate and as clearing houses of ideas. Indeed as the little magazines became the primary centres for establishing new taste, they also found a role in establishing new writers" (pp.203-4).

True to its promise N.A. did concentrate on "politics, literature and art" in such a stimulating and cosmopolitan fashion that by 1908 (by which time Orage was sole editor) it had a circulation of 20,000.[13] The reason for the great success of the periodical, as seen by one commentator, was that it extended "to a new literate", articulating the interests and "aspirations of thousands of individuals and small groups throughout the country who were uncommitted, progressive and for the most part young".[14] Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer), however, saw it differently. He claimed that the appeal of the periodical was more widespread,

> The readers of 'The New Age' are very numerous and come from widely different classes. I have known several Army Officers who regularly studied its pages, together with at least two colonial officials, solicitors and members of the Bar. On the other hand, I have known it read regularly by board-school teachers, shop assistants, servants, artisans and members of the poor generally ("Women and Men" in The Little Review, May, 1918, pp.59-60).

Certainly, Orage's own view of his readership was that it cut across class boundaries. N.A. readers belonged, wrote Orage, to "Matthew Arnold's fourth class, the class, namely that lies outside the welter-ing masses, and is composed of individuals who have overcome their class prejudices" (N.A., 27 Jan., 1909, p.28).

One way of describing such a readership was to refer to it as the "intelligentsia", a word adopted from Russia and which in its original form described the kind of intellectual and political movement which had taken place in Moscow in the 1890's, a movement in which ideological and political differences were transcended by the need to formulate a new social ideal, a movement with which N.A. readership was to identify itself.[15]

[13] Carswell, p.41.

[14] Carswell, p.41.

[15] Wallace Martin, 'The New Age' under Orage, p.142. O.E.D. gives the earliest use of "intelligentsia" as 1917, but in fact, as Martin points out, the word appeared in N.A. from 1913 onwards. Martin traces the first use of the word in Harold Lister's article, "A Visit to the Doctor" (N.A., 2 Oct., 1913). Prior to that date the word was used by Maurice Baring (author of Landmarks in Russian Literature, 1910) who was the first to apply it to the British cultural scene in "Russian Intelligentsia" in The Eye Witness, 11 Jan., 1912, pp.112-3.

While the chief function of N.A. was to act as a platform for the socialist movement, by maintaining an editorial policy which insisted on scrutinizing the philosophical basis of Socialism, and by consistently insisting upon an aesthetic breadth, the periodical avoided the extremes of propaganda and encouraged instead a healthy and intellectually energetic dialectic. The overall result was that N.A. achieved a vigour unique in the journalism of the period, for there is no other journal of the time which so acutely captures that intense exploration of ideas in all spheres of life, which was to give to N.A. its hallmark of eclecticism. What is remarkable about its achievement is that in an historical period characterized by the onslaught of cultural fragmentation, this periodical sought to integrate new ideas and forms with the old, striving constantly for some kind of continuity.

Once again the strength of this achievement rests firmly with Orage, particularly in his role as critic. Orage took over the literary column in 1913, which up until that time had been written mainly by Arnold Bennett.[16] As a critic, Orage belongs with the humanist/idealist line in English criticism, the line which Arnold had preserved in the nineteenth century and which was to be continued in the twentieth by Eliot, Richards and Leavis. The foundation of Orage's critical stance was unequivocally classical, derived from his study of Plato and Aristotle. His critical approach was defined by Arnold's Culture and Anarchy and was supplemented by a wide reading in various literatures.

Orage's prime concern as a critic was with the cognitive aspects of literature. Whether stated explicitly or implicitly, literature to Orage, always had a moral intent and was to be judged therefore in terms of value. Although prepared to encourage the experimentation of Pound and Wyndham Lewis, Orage could also be sharply critical of

[16]A selection of Orage's criticism for N.A. was published as Readers and Writers (1917-1921) by R.H.C.(Orage's pseudonym). Arnold Bennett's literary alias was Jacob Tonson and a number of his reviews were published as Books and Persons: Being Comments on a Past Epoch: 1908-1911 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1917).

their methods. "Mr. Lewis", wrote Orage, "is for creating a 'nature' of his own imagination. I am for idealizing the Nature that already exists in strenuous imperfection. He is for Vorticism: I am for idealization of the actual. It is worth quarrelling about" (N.A., 29 July, 1915, p.309). As with the debates on Socialism, so with literature, Orage was prepared to allow both sides of the argument to be heard and ideas for and against the various new movements in poetry, as well as debates on the new in fiction and drama, found expression.

A key term in Orage's critical vocabulary was Arnold's "Disinterestedness", which described a critical attitude free, as far as was possible, from the kind of political and personal bias which could distort aesthetic judgement.[17] The task of the critic, according to Orage, was first of all to grasp the significance of the work itself and from that initial understanding broaden others appreciation both of individual works of art and of the nature of the aesthetic dimension. "Criticism does not create literature", wrote Orage, "but it creates appreciation for it, and, above all, it extends the domain of the good" (N.A., 17 Feb., 1916, p.372).[18]

[17] Lectures and Essays in Criticism. Vol. III of The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold. ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp.263-4. "Disinterestedness is used by Arnold in "The Function of Criticism" to describe the quality of life in the classical period. Thus, to Arnold, the Greek and Roman eras were, "in the man disinterestedly intellectual and spiritual movements; movements in which the human spirit looked for its satisfaction in itself and in the increased play of its own activity".

[18] The fact that Orage has received so little attention as a critic in his own right is probably because Eliot, who came after him, emerged as a more brilliant champion of the classical tradition in criticism. Yet, Eliot himself did not underestimate Orage's abilities and described him as "the best literary critic of that time in London" (The New English Weekly, 15 Nov., 1934). As would be expected, what Eliot most admires in Orage is his insistence upon the moral significance of literature.

Orage's critical ability tells in the sheer number of important writers and thinkers whose ideas first came to the attention of a general reading public through the periodical. Under the editorship of Orage, N.A. introduced the works of Nietzsche (this will be detailed later in the discussion), Hulme's translation of Bergson first appeared there, as later Hulme's own Notebooks, edited by Herbert Read, were published there. Pound and Wyndham Lewis were part of a second wave of writers who, following on from Wells, Belloc and Bennett, began writing for N.A. around 1911. William Archer and Shaw wrote the dramatic commentary, and in addition to introducing foreign dramatists who were little known in Britain, dramatists like Chekhov, D'Annunzio, Gorky, Wedekind and Pirandello, the periodical actively campaigned for the establishment of Repertory Theatre, spurred on by what had been achieved by the Abbey in Dublin by playwrights like Synge, whose Playboy of the Western World was the first drama to be reviewed in the newly revived N.A.

The eclectic note struck by N.A. extended to all art forms, and the journal was one of the first in Britain to give publicity to artists of the stature of Picasso, Epstein and Gaudier-Brzesca. The great Post-Impressionist exhibition in London in 1910, marked the beginning of what was seen as a new and distinctively modern aesthetic, and the enthusiasm with which it was hailed was to extend to the Futurist exhibition of 1913. In the following year, N.A. published Marinetti's "A Futurist Manifesto", while the major movements of modernism -- Dadaism, German Expressionism and Surrealism -- were, in the course of time, to be given the characteristic N.A. scrutiny.

Bibliographies of the leading British writers of the day were a regular educative feature of N.A., but the main emphasis was on works in translation. In addition to introducing Gide, Valéry and Stendhal to N.A. readership, Arnold Bennett, having read Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov in a French translation, was to focus attention on Russian literature, and provided the spur for the first translation into English of Dostoevsky's classic. "The crying need of the day", wrote Bennett,"is a complete and faithful translation of Dostoevsky.... It is the duty of one or other of our publishers to commission Mrs. C. Garnett to do it" (N.A., 9 Feb., 1911, p.34).

Bennett's interest in Russian fiction was part of that more general preoccupation of N.A. of looking to Russia for artistic and spiritual models. This interest was itself part of the temper of the time and was stimulated by the arrival in London of a number of oustanding Russian artists. Diaghilev's Ballet Russe with the music of Stravinsky and the dancing of Nijinsky, and later the ballerina Pavlova and the actor Stanislavski, all served to draw public attention to Russian culture, with a degree of intensity that amounted to religious fervour.

The Russian Renaissance of which the aforementioned artists were a product, was part of the 1890's Moscow movement, referred to earlier. At the centre of this movement had been the religious mystic Vladimir Soloviev, who had provided Russia with a vision of spiritual unity. Soloviev's philosophy, sharing as it did with Theosophy the same background in hermeticism, generated an interest similar in kind to that produced by the Theosophical Society, and his writings and poems, together with the works of Merezhkovsky and Blok, the literary artists on whom he was to have the strongest influence, appeared regularly in N.A. from 1910 on. This stream of literature from modern Russia was to have a profound effect on MacDiarmid and explains a great deal of what has been seen as obtuse

in his work; however this will be analyzed in greater detail later.

The sense of a great creative awakening which was of the essence of the public interest in Russian culture, was to be transferred to home ground. In 1910, the death of Edward VII seemed to mark the end of everything associated with the Victorian era, and that feeling of a clean sweep was characterized by a new energy and optimism about the future.[19] A "new age" was indeed seen to be to hand, one which Galsworthy referred to as the coming "Renaissance" (N.A., 12 May, 1910, p.26) and which Pound saw as a "Risorgimento" which would have its roots in America (N.A., 1 May, 1913).[20] Orage too was prepared to give cognizance to the possibility of a Renaissance, but argued that such an event would have to be preceded by radical changes in the structure of the existing social order. He wrote,

> If I were asked upon what I rely for the renaissance in England, I should say a miracle. But it does not follow that because we cannot define the causes of miracles, miracles are not therefore to be understood. They can be understood readily enough if they are regarded as works of art instead of works of logic ... the miracle that may be confidently anticipated in England is not necessarily one that we cannot sense in advance or cannot even deliberately create. We can both divine what it will be and prepare for its coming (N.A., 10 Oct., 1912, p.569).

[19] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism" in Modernism, pp.19-55. In attempting to identify the specific historical period in which modernism emerged, the authors in this survey state that certain critics see these pre-war years very much in terms of the beginning of the movement. They write, "Stephen Spender and Graham Hough ... detect ... a period of enhanced intensity between 1910 and the beginning of the First World War - years which in Graham Hough's view, witnessed a 'revolution in literature of the English language as momentous as the Romantic one'" (p.32).

[20] Quoted in Martin, 'The New Age' under Orage, pp.129-30.

According to Orage, a renaissance could be initiated, but would only be realized through planned change, presumably of the kind that he was already attempting to establish through his Guild Socialism.

Orage had founded this movement in 1911, together with S.G. Hobson and A.J. Penty. As the name suggests, the movement was modelled on William Morris's mediaeval guilds concept. "The creation of guilds" would ensure, wrote Orage, "all the privileges as well as all the responsibilities of ancient guildsmen" (N.A., 3 June, 1909). Guild Socialism was to be an alternative both to Fabianism and the Trade Union movement, which organizations, in Orage's opinion, had completely abandoned their original ideals. The re-establishment of Guilds would be a corrective to the evils of collectivism, for the aim would be to decentralize government by allowing power to pass to the craft guilds, who, in turn, would work in conjunction with other groups to create democratically a more organic community.[21] The practical operation of such a system was never worked out in detail, so Guild Socialism remained very much an ideal. The movement gained momentum during the First World War and attracted several leading intellectuals (Bertrand Russell, for example) but after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the group split and was absorbed into the Communist and Labour parties. By that time, Orage recognized that he had to become less concerned with utopian models of Socialism and more interested in economic realities. He began to adopt and helped to write, the Social Credit policies of Major C.M. Douglas, whose theories were first aired in N.A.[22]

[21]For Orage's own account of the aims and objectives of the movement see National Guilds: An Enquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out (London: Bell, 1914).

[22]These articles were later published under Douglas's name as Social Credit (London: Palmer, 1924).

Social Credit advocated the control of the monetary system by the state, a system which would operate by the issuing of credits in the form of a national dividend to each person, based on an assessment of the real wealth of the nation. To prevent the possibility of inflation a just price for all goods would be established by the state and the inequalities of the prevailing system would be remedied by supplying people with credit based upon potential goods and services. The resources of the country, Douglas was to argue, were the people's right and heritage and should be protected from exploitation by the international monetarists, who, Douglas maintained, were involved in a conspiracy of financial control.

In the literary world Douglas was to find a champion of his ideas in Ezra Pound, who supported Douglas's theory of international usury, and, more suprisingly (for Douglas, like Orage, was bitterly opposed to Communism) in MacDiarmid himself, who throughout all of his political involvements, even as a member of the Communist Party, continued to support Douglas's theories, advocating that they be adopted as the economic foundation of an independent Scotland. MacDiarmid developed a friendship with Douglas through N.A. and in 1931 published Douglas's Warning Democracy.

While many of the intellectuals of the day were, like Orage and Douglas, actively looking for ways of altering the class base of their society, and firmly believed that not only was change possible, but inevitable, it is not difficult to see, in retrospect, why these individuals and many like them felt so acutely that they were living in an era of unparalleled transformation. The years between 1890 and the early 1920's witnessed the greatest tide of intellectual and cultural awakening, as well as social upheaval,

known to man, in which change relating to the status of the individual within the social frame was accompanied by the emergence of a new and revolutionary understanding of the nature of the physical world.

By the early 1900's, radioactivity, quantum theory and the special theory of relativity were already known. But in 1915, when Einstein released his general theory of relativity, the magnitude of this revolution in perception began to strike home. The old Newtonian model of the universe was displaced by that of a four-dimensional space-time continuum, with the result that traditional concepts of time, space, motion and matter had to be re-thought. Since its inception, N.A. had pioneered a journalism which although primarily philosophical, literary and socialist in outlook, had consistently attempted to introduce and report on scientific research, labouring to make the new work in such subjects as eugenics, psychology, physiology, biology and chemistry, and now physics, intelligible to the layman. Concern with the major ideas of his day, from whatever source, was Orage's response to the limitations imposed by over-specialization. Consequently, he did not underestimate the significance beyond the purely scientific of Einstein's new physics. As early as 1919, N.A. ran an article by R.H. Western entitled, "The Principles of Relativity" (N.A., 27 Nov., 1919, pp.54-56) which was followed by a series of articles, "Relativity and Metaphysics", by the same author (N.A., 1, 19, 15 Jan., 1920). In 1921, Eddington's Space, Time and Gravitation was reviewed (N.A., 21 April, 1921, pp.298-9) and thereafter letters and articles by the popularizers of relativity theory -- Haldane, James Jeans -- and later, Alfred North Whitehead, the first to attempt to formulate a philosophy from the new understanding, appeared regularly.

Prior to, then concurrent with, the articles on relativity, ran introductions to the theories of Freud and Jung, the first of which was a review by A.E. Randall of Ernest Jones' "The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery" (N.A., 16 July and 10 Oct., 1914). Freud's Interpretation of Dreams had been published on the Continent in 1899, but was not translated into English until 1913. In 1914, a close friend of Orage's, M.D. Eder, a psychoanalyst, began what is considered to be the earliest authoritative translations of Freud and as these works became available they were reviewed and assessed by N.A. writers, for example, Randall reviewed Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious and commented that "What Darwin did for Biology, Professor Freud has done for psychology, and with similar results" (N.A., 11 Jan., 1917, pp.59-60).[23]

Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious appeared in 1915 and his imaginative interpretation of myth and legend was to prove to be a seminal influence on many modern writers, and in those ranks are included MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir. Muir was to adopt Jungian theory as the foundation of his own literary aesthetic and he also submitted himself to psychoanalytic therapy. Recording the debates and controversy that had surrounded the introduction of these ideas on the nature of consciousness, Muir wrote,

> For some years 'The New Age' had been publishing articles on psychoanalysis, in which Freud's and Jung's theories were discussed from every angle, philosophical, religious and literary as well as scientific. The conception of the unconscious seemed to throw new light on every human problem and change its terms, and the False Dawnists ... of whom I was one, snatched at it as the revelation which was to transform the whole world of perception. Orage himself was deeply interested in it at that time, though later he came to regard it as a misleading path (An Autobiography, p.159).

[23]Martin, p.5. Martin sees the part played by N.A. in introducing the ideas of psychoanalysis to the public as second to none. He writes, "It would be impossible to discuss the introduction of psychoanalysis in England without reference to N.A. M.D. Eder, one of England's first analysts ... introduced its readers and writers to the subject long before the rest of the English press had discovered its existence".

MacDiarmid's response to these theories was as guarded as Orage's seems to have been, but there is little question that Jung's representation of consciousness as an evolutionary process, based as it was on a study of comparative philology, was directly complementary to MacDiarmid's own etymological interest in Scots and to his development of the view that the rich expressive vocabulary of the vernacular contained a psychology at once distinctive and representative.

In the period between 1912 and the early 1920's, the nature of the change in perception brought about by the new physics and by the theories of the unconscious had its social counterpart in the massive upheavals that were taking place in Europe. The impression that N.A. gives is that reaction to the war was not one of unanimity. Similarly, despite the great interest in Russia, the 1917 Revolution, although recognized as a cataclysmic event, did not meet with wholesale approval. Ouspensky, prior to his fleeing to Britain, had a series of letters published in N.A. describing the Bolshevik Revolution and denouncing it as a retreat into barbarism. ("Letter from Russia", 11, 18, 25 Dec., 1919) Once again in the pages of N.A. debate raged around the fundamental questions of social organization, but this time the interest no longer centred on the Fabianism of Shaw, Wells and the Webbs, or on Belloc and Chesterton's critique of collectivism, but on the principles of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Orage did not, like so many of his contemporaries, begin to move gradually towards embracing the ideals of dialectical materialism. Instead, Orage, influenced by the arrival in Britain of so many Russian mystics was, in the period after 1918, to become increasingly concerned with the need to find a new spiritual strength, and this is reflected in the periodical in the increased emphasis on religion and mysticism in works and articles by writers like Shestov, Count Keyserling,

George Steiner, Soloviev, Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. Such a preoccupation on the part of Orage reflected his earlier interest in Theosophy, but was also an indication that in 1922 he would relinquish the editorship of N.A. in order to join Gurdjieff's Institute of Harmonious Development at Fontainebleau.[24]

After Orage ceased to be editor, N.A. deteriorated, becoming more or less the organ of Social Credit, but in the years in which Orage had managed the periodical it had captured the many cross-currents which viewed now from an historical perspective can be seen at work attempting to formulate new understandings of the nature of mind and matter in art and science. The sense of enquiry generated by this journal, together with its ability to cut across class boundaries and to inspire in many of its readers and writers a sense of shared purpose and the possibility of actively creating a new and fuller social order, constituted its greatest achievement. In what was to prove to be a crucial historical period, N.A. provided not only a field of far-ranging intellectual stimulation for a newly emerging "intelligentsia", but also opened up a range of opportunities for many young writers -- among them MacDiarmid -- whose abilities, without such outlets as N.A. offered, might well have atrophied.

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[24]Orage stayed with Gurdjieff for seven years, spending part of the time in France and part in New York. In New York he acted as spokesman and fund-raiser for Gurdjieff and it was also there that Orage recognized their irreconcilable differences. Orage married in New York and at fifty five became a father for the first time. It would seem that the attractions of a simple family life proved in the end to be more powerful and rewarding for Orage than all of Gurdjieff's mysticism.

Chapter Three

MacDiarmid's Association with 'The New Age'

In recognizing the important role N.A. had played in his own intellectual development, Edwin Muir recorded that while reading the periodical gave him a false sense of "superiority", it nevertheless equipped him with "an adequate picture of contemporary politics and literature" which "with a few vigorous blows shortened a process which would otherwise have taken a long time" (An Autobiography, pp.122-3). N.A. performed a similar function for MacDiarmid and can be identified as the breeding ground of themes and ideas which were to preoccupy him throughout his life.

From the MacDiarmid/Ogilvie correspondence it is clear that MacDiarmid saw himself as belonging to the "intelligentsia" of N.A. and there are in these letters references both to the periodical and to writers whose works could only have been available to MacDiarmid through reading the journal. Gorky, Chekhov, Valéry and Gide are all referred to, as are N.A. "regulars", Pound, Wyndham Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett, Belloc and Orage. Towards Orage himself MacDiarmid directed a great deal of admiration and like so many others saw in the editor a model of his own aspirations. MacDiarmid, like Muir, corresponded with Orage, but did not meet him until the early thirties in London, when Orage, who had by that time terminated his association with Gurdjieff, had returned to London and was editing The New English Weekly.[1] MacDiarmid was later to recall his great excitement at the prospect of meeting Orage for the first time. He wrote,

[1]On his return to London, Orage tried to take over his old role as editor of N.A. but was unsuccessful and settled instead for the editorship referred to above. Orage died in 1934 shortly after giving his first broadcast which was a talk on Social Credit. More than forty tributes to him from leading writers of the day appeared in The New English Weekly, 15 Nov., 1934.

> When news got around that he was back, a mutual friend offered to motor me down to the out-of-the-way Sussex farmhouse where he was living. Great secrecy was enjoined upon me and the visit was given all the trappings of melodrama. But I was not disappointed. Orage was well worth meeting under any circumstances. A little later I saw a great deal of him in London (The Company I've Kept, p.271).

MacDiarmid was critical of Orage's mysticism and did not approve of his involvement with Gurdjieff; nevertheless, he felt that as an editor and critic Orage was without equal, a fact which tells in the way in which MacDiarmid was to model his own periodical on N.A. and in his adoption of so many of Orage's critical attitudes.

Through N.A. MacDiarmid was to come into contact with a number of people who were to remain his close friends, and who provided him with a stimulating interchange of ideas. Denis Saurat, a French philosopher whose interest in mysticism in literature would have attracted him to Orage's ideas, had his major philosophical work, The Three Conventions, serialized in N.A. Saurat later became an early champion of MacDiarmid's poetry, describing it as "Synthetic Scots", and translating it into French. Kaikhosru Sorabji (Leon Dudley Sorabji) who was for a time music critic of N.A. was a friend of Saurat, Edwin Muir and MacDiarmid's schoolmaster from Langholm, F.G. Scott. Muir knew Saurat and Scott from his Glasgow days when Saurat was lecturing at Glasgow University and Scott was teaching music at one of the colleges there, and between these three men and MacDiarmid there developed, in the early twenties, strong and creative friendships, although later Muir and MacDiarmid were to become bitter opponents over the questions of Scottish Nationalism and the vernacular movement.[2]

[2] The closeness of the friendship of these men is attested to in MacDiarmid's letters. All of them seemed to have had a very high regard for F.G. Scott which is supported by the fact that in 1926 Saurat's The Three Conventions, Muir's Transition and MacDiarmid's A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, were all dedicated to him.

MacDiarmid's own association with N.A. began as early as 1911, when at the age of nineteen he contributed an article, "The Young Astrology". (20 July, p.274) Reflecting perhaps the influence of the collection of works on astronomy in the Langholm Library, the article deals with the effects of planetary movement on the lives of historical characters. "Man being a product not only of earth but the universe", wrote the young MacDiarmid, "there are cosmic factors to be taken into account which are usually ignored...." The characteristics of man's earth-bound nature, the article makes clear, are to be regarded as the constant or determined element in life. This constant is, however, counter-balanced by astrological influences which introduce into life the necessary elements of chance and change. These two principles taken together -- the hereditary and the astrological -- "are found to confirm and complete each other ... parental generation supplying the needful element of constancy, sidereal influence the no less necessary element of variability". The actual argument of the article is of much less interest than this juxtaposing of fixity and fluidity, which even at this early stage, emerges as MacDiarmid's dominant preoccupation.

MacDiarmid's contributions to N.A. were interrupted by the war years and by his different journalistic pursuits, but between 1924 and 1928 he began writing regularly for the periodical and thereafter wrote the occasional article to 1931. Under his own name, C.M. Grieve, MacDiarmid wrote on a variety of topics, mainly literary, and under a variant spelling of his pseudonym wrote a review column, "New Poetry". During the period of his greatest involvement with N.A., that is from 1924 to 1928, MacDiarmid referred to himself as literary editor of the journal.

MacDiarmid produced close to one hundred articles for N.A. and while detailed examination of this work lies outside the limits of the present study, as a collection N.A. articles give a good indication of the enormous scope of MacDiarmid's interests during these years. The following titles will suggest the range:

"Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics" (N.A., 1 May, 1924, pp.6-8).

"Wallace Stevens" (N.A., 7 August, 1924, pp.174-5). This is one of the first appreciations of Stevens's work and MacDiarmid clearly recognizes him as a major talent.

"'The Dial', Yeats, Strindberg, and Modern Swedish Literature" (N.A., 25 Sept., 1924, pp.260-1).

"Croce and Certain European Writers" (N.A., 2 Oct., 1924, pp.271-2).

"Rimbaud, Paul Valéry and Others" (N.A., 15 Jan., 1925, pp.139-40).

"Gertrude Stein" (N.A., 18 Feb., 1926, p.189 and 4 March, 1926, p.213).

"Modern Poetry - Doughty and the Sitwells" (N.A., 31 March, 1927, p.262).

Discussion of economic theory occurs in many of the articles and there is a series with a distinct Social Credit slant, as is evident from the title, "Scotland and the Banking System". (N.A., 21, 28 April, 1927, 5, 12, 19 May, 1927) There is also an interesting and recurrent use of scientific metaphor in some of the articles, for example, in an extended review of Edwin Muir's Latitudes, MacDiarmid wrote that the function of literary criticism will always be like "trying to reach a velocity just beyond that of light" (N.A., 5 June, 1924, p.66).

Of chief interest among these articles are those dealing with MacDiarmid's response to contemporary Russian literature, for in these MacDiarmid demonstrates that he had acquired a sophisticated knowledge of pre- and post-revolutionary writing. In a lengthy but damning critique

of Saintsbury's History of Criticism ("Foreign Literature", N.A., 3 17, 24 Dec., 1925), MacDiarmid wrote that the author had "failed to perceive the diathesis of reorientation, which had already gone a long way towards ensuring to Russia that overwhelming importance and influence which, in its full manifestation is ... the phenomenon par excellence of contemporary literature" (N.A., 3 Dec., 1925, p.57). This comment sums up MacDiarmid's general response to contemporary reviews of Russian literature, most of which -- he makes the point again and again -- had completely misjudged the strength of modern Russian literature. For a better understanding of the new movements in Russian writing, MacDiarmid recommends to his readers works which had not been translated into English. For example, he states that a work on the poetry of revolutionary Russia, Basnici Revoluchiko Ruska by Dr. Frantisek Kubka, is the first "thoroughly comprehensive account" of the subject and an important corrective to an unidentified current English review, which had failed to deal with the influence of "Soloviev on Blok and others" ("Basnici Revoluchiko Ruska by Dr. Frantisek Kubka", 13 Nov., 1924, pp.31-2).

The earliest work in English dealing with modern Russian literature in anything like a comprehensive fashion, D.S. Mirsky's Modern Russian Literature (1925), was also unfavourably reviewed by MacDiarmid, for he wrote that while Mirsky had dealt with the major literary figures, "So far as the poets are concerned he has done to Russia, and particularly to contemporary Russia, pretty much as would have been done to England by one who mentioned none save the contributors to 'Georgian Poetry'" (N.A., 25 June, 1925, p.92). Mirsky's second work, Contemporary Russian Literature (1926), a greatly expanded volume, however, received MacDiarmid's praise, both for Mirsky's having acted on MacDiarmid's suggestion to include a bibliography of French and German works on the subject, and for Mirsky's much more developed, extensive and compre-

hensive approach to the subject. "So far as British readers are concerned", wrote MacDiarmid, "this book must be the first glimpse of a whole continent of recent literature" (N.A., 4 Nov., 1926, p.9). What is obvious from the foregoing is that MacDiarmid was not only capable of making informed commentary on the subject, but by identifying specific areas suggests the nature of his own particular interests, and those interests centred on the influence of Soloviev on modern Russian aesthetics.

The importance of Soloviev to MacDiarmid was that the Russian offered an holistic philosophy. Although Soloviev's investigations centred on hermeticism, he did not reject scientific rationalism, but, rather, attempted to formulate a philosophy which would simultaneously take account of that part of the universe which science had been increasingly able to provide explanations of, and that which it had not. The unknown to Soloviev was as much a part of our reality as the more readily recognizable aspects of life. Indeed, he felt that what the former represented was that which existed in potential. Science and art were not therefore distinct modes of knowledge to Soloviev, for they were to be seen as complementary in so far as both directed their energies towards making the previously unknown -- the previously unexperienced -- accessible.

In a two-part article, "Art and the Unknown" (N.A., 20, 27 May, 1926),[3] MacDiarmid set out an aesthetic statement which is very much based on this aspect of Soloviev's philosophy. Written in an aphoristic style derived from Nietzsche (one much favoured by many N.A. writers) the central statement of this article is that "The function of art is the extension of human consciousness". Thus, art is to be seen as that which enlarges our range of vision and understanding,

[3] Reprinted in S.E., pp.44-48.

"If consciousness is likened to a clear space", wrote MacDiarmid, "art is that which extends in any direction". The true artist is therefore he who "reaches some point in the unknown outside the cleared space and then adds to the cleared space". Such a task always required, "a new synthesis of intellect and spirit", a synthesis which would function by "establishing a new balance of the various parts of man" in a way which required that all great leaps forward in knowledge would be synthesized into one whole.[4] This new situation could only take place by the coming together of art and science, for, MacDiarmid wrote, "there are sciences which must transcend themselves and become something higher - that is to say Art". This concern with effecting some higher order from the dichotomy of art and science is indicative of MacDiarmid's need to find a way of encompassing the whole of life in the way that he felt Soloviev's philosophy had succeeded in doing, and to those efforts MacDiarmid was to bring a religious intensity.

The period of MacDiarmid's greatest activity for N.A. was also one of his most productive, for by 1926 he was not only engaged in producing his first two collections of poetry and his first major work, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, but was also publishing his own periodicals. After his war service MacDiarmid, now married to Peggy Skinner, a girl he had met while working for a Scottish newspaper, had returned to Scotland and settled in the east-coast town of Montrose, where he was to live for the next ten years and where he was to begin to develop actively his literary abilities in conjunction with his vision of a national renaissance. From Montrose MacDiarmid edited, firstly, Northern Numbers, a "Georgian" review of poetry which went through three series between 1920 and 1922, and, secondly, The Scottish Chapbook,[5]

[4]This particular line is cited in a footnote to the article and is attributed to Count Keyserling. Keyserling's ideas were, like that of almost all contemporary Russian writers (including Shestov, Ouspensky, Merezhkovsky and Blok) derived from Soloviev's philosophy.

[5]Hereafter referred to as S.C.

the periodical which was to champion the Scottish Renaissance and which was to a large degree modelled on N.A. The editorials MacDiarmid wrote for S.C. demonstrate both the continuing influence of N.A. on his literary and cultural activities and the way in which he was to develop from that influence to acquire an intellectual and literary distinctiveness.

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Chapter Four

'The Scottish Chapbook'

S.C. presented itself as an innovative force in Scottish letters. On the frontispiece of the periodical, under the logo of the lion rampant, ran the slogan, "Not traditions - precedents", and the editorials or "causeries" (a favourite N.A. term) were full of a fire and challenge designed to provoke and stimulate. S.C. had a brief but lively run and the ambitiousness of the endeavour marks the style in which MacDiarmid was to conduct his campaign for revitalizing Scottish culture.[1] The statement of editorial policy on the opening page smacked of the influence of modernist manifestos, for the aims of the periodical were set out as being,

> To report, support and stimulate, in particular, the activities of the Franco-Scottish, Scottish Italian and kindred associations; the campaign of the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club for the revival of the Doric; the movement towards a Scots National Theatre ... to encourage and publish the work of contemporary Scottish poets and dramatists whether in English, Gaelic or Braid Scots. To insist upon a truer evaluation of the work of Scottish writers than are usually given in the present over-Anglicized condition of British literary journalism, and, in criticism, elucidate, apply and develop the distinctively Scottish range of values. To cultivate 'the lovely virtue'. And generally, to 'meddle wi' the Thistle' and pick the figs (S.C., Aug., 1922).

From the start, MacDiarmid's goal was to establish the kind of literary cosmopolitanism for which N.A. had become noted, and he was to emphasize constantly to Scottish writers the importance of contact with the breadth of European and American literature as an alternative and corrective to the dominating influence of the English tradition.

[1] S.C. ran from August 1922 to November/December 1923. All of the issues were monthly except the last two.

In the first editorial, MacDiarmid declared that he planned to model his own publication on a periodical which in 1895 had led a Celtic political/cultural movement -- Patrick Geddes' Evergreen. Geddes had attempted to restore Scotland's old cultural links with Europe by advocating the re-establishment of the Scots Colleges.[2] Scotland, Geddes had felt, needed to develop a spirit of national revival separate from the rest of Britain, for he believed that such a revival would lead ultimately to the improvement of Scotland's socially backward condition.[3] Of Geddes' journal, MacDiarmid wrote, that "while the organ of a band of social reformers in the poorest quarters in Edinburgh", it also "touched an international note, and kept up the spirit of the best ideals in literature and art" (S.C., Aug., 1922, p.4).[4] Such was to be the goal of S.C. International models would be used to stimulate a new creativity, but the emphasis would be on Scottish content through "the revival of the Doric", writing in "English", "Braid Scots" and "Gaelic" (although in fact, very little Gaelic was to be presented). After the fashion of N.A., S.C. provided biographies and bibliographies of writers likely to be of interest, but these writers were exclusively Scottish, for MacDiarmid recognized that the great need was to begin to educate Scots about their own literary background, something which the "over-Anglicized" schools had failed to do.

S.C. was out to establish new standards and what was needed to begin with, MacDiarmid claimed, was a reformulation of what constituted Scottish life and art. Literary criticism could play a vital role, wrote MacDiarmid, if it could identify and "elucidate" a "distinctively Scottish range of values" (p.4). The old standards of judgement, which all too often had simply been forms of self-congratulation had to go, and MacDiarmid himself was prepared to point the

[2]H.J. Hanham, Scottish Nationalism (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p.43.

[3]Hanham, p.43.

[4]MacDiarmid met Geddes through Orage, but he had long been an admirer of the man. An early ecologist, Geddes believed in the interconnectedness of all life forms and advocated an "organic", or as he described it a "biocentric" way of life. For an account of MacDiarmid's involvement with Geddes see The Company I've Kept, pp.79-84.

way by launching an attack on the stock assumptions Scots made about their culture. He wrote,

> ... for several generations Scottish literature has neither seen nor heard nor understood what was taking place around it. For that reason it remains a dwarf among giants. Scottish writers have been terrified even to appear inconstant to established conventions ... they have stood still and consequently been left behind in technique and ideation ... Meanwhile the Scottish nation has been radically transformed in temperament and tendency; Scottish life has been given a drastic reorientation, with the result that Scottish literature today is in no sense representative or adequate... (p.3).

MacDiarmid made it clear that he was out to destroy the parochial in his native tradition and warned writers that in order to achieve a qualitative change in Scottish letters they had to learn to steer a course through the "Charybdis of English superiority" and the "Scylla" of Scottish "Indignant Old Ladyism" (p.35). If there was to be a new force in literature, wrote MacDiarmid, it would have to be one which was prepared to direct all its energies toward achieving a real creativity and not lose itself in insularity and trivialities. A proper and objective understanding of contemporary culture was the initial goal, and he warned that the "literary cultivation of the Vernacular - as of the Gaelic - is merely one aspect of that; a problem within a problem" (S.C., Oct., 1922. p.62). He would not, he stated, "support the campaign for the revival of the Doric where the essential Scottish diversity-in-unity is forgotten, nor where the tendencies are anti-cultural" (p.62). The direction was to be towards new aesthetic horizons which would involve confronting the same kind of problems facing every major writer of the day, irrespective of nationality, for only by achieving literary works which were of that kind of standard would a Scottish revival, insisted MacDiarmid, have any effect outside of national boundaries and have anything of universal importance to say.

As with N.A., so with S.C., MacDiarmid used two names, with most of the prose commentary (and a few poems in English) signed Grieve and the work in the vernacular signed MacDiarmid. The first piece to appear under his now famous pseudonym was, however, a short drama, entitled Nisbet: An Interlude in Post-War Glasgow.[5] The name of the title character is that of a schoolfriend from Broughton (referred to several times in the letters to Ogilvie) whom MacDiarmid greatly admired, but who was killed in the war. Characteristic of post-war attitudes, the main idea of the piece is that Western civilization has reached the end of its historical phase. Nisbet declares that some new cultural form will emerge to replace the old, "We must wait", he states, "... for the new beginning which will come from a civilisation other than ours". Young, the Communist character in the drama replies, "the renewal is coming, has begun to come from Russia ... in Dostoevsky is to be found the first delineation of that new world". MacDiarmid's enthusiasm for Russian culture was beginning to surface in his creative works.

The journal began to explore actively the forms and possibilities of a Scottish revival, and as it did so, Grieve acted as critic and commentator on MacDiarmid's work, and not in uncharitable terms, for he wrote,

> The work of Mr. Hugh M'Diarmid who contributes a poem and a semi-dramatic study to this issue, is peculiarly interesting because he is, I think, the first Scottish writer who has addressed himself to the question of the extendability (without psychological violence) of the Vernacular to embrace the whole range of modern culture - or, in other words, tried to make up the leeway of the language ... What he has to do is to adapt an essentially rustic tongue to the very much more complex requirements of our urban civilisation... (S.C., Oct., 1922, p.62).

[5]The drama was serialized in two parts and appeared in S.C. August 1922, pp.15-19 and Sept., 1922, pp.46-50.

The editorials lauded these efforts in the vernacular and explained that MacDiarmid was overcoming the great difficulty presented by the Doric which was that "a modern consciousness cannot fully express itself" in that medium. (p.62) MacDiarmid's work, it was suggested, showed that what a writer in the vernacular had to do was not only "think himself back into the spirit of the Doric (that is to say, recover it in its entirety, with all the potentialities it once had, ridding it, for his purpose, of those innate disabilities and limitations which have brought it to its present pass)", but also begin to develop the potential of the language. (p.62) The modern Scottish poet had to carry the language "forward with him, accumulating all the wealth of association and idiom which progressive desuetude has withheld from it until it is adequate to his present needs - the needs not of a ploughman but of a twentieth-century artist who is at once a Scotsman (as distinct from an Englishman or negro) and a good European or Western World-Man" (pp.62-3). The poet writing in Scots, MacDiarmid insisted, had to locate himself in the particularity of his own language, while assuming the traditional poetic role of universal voice. The advantage of writing in Scots, MacDiarmid explained, was that it contained those qualities which he had earlier said had to be identified before there could be any really new writing in Scotland, for what the vernacular possessed was "lapsed or unrealized qualities which correspond to 'unconscious' elements of distinctively Scottish psychology" (p.63).

Through S.C., MacDiarmid began to campaign for a vernacular revival and at the same time launched an attack on such hallowed institutions as the Burns Clubs. Such organizations, MacDiarmid was to claim, were nothing but cankers of bardolatry and "mental

inbreeding" and they were to become the butt of his satiric genius. Instead of groups of people dedicated, as he saw it, to the preservation of parochialism, what MacDiarmid had in mind was a gathering of personalities who would pay adequate tribute to Burns, a gathering such as the following.

> ... imagine Mr. G.K. Chesterton proposing 'The Immortal Memory' at the London Robert Burns Dinner and the other speakers including Dr. Caldwell, Professor of Moral Philosophy, M'Gill University, Montreal; Dr. Sumichrast, Emeritus Professor of Harvard University; and Dr. Kallas, Esthonian Minister in London. One cannot! But nevertheless it will have happened in all its polyethnic preposterousness before these lines appear in print... (S.C., Jan., 1923, p.154).

The Burns Supper described above was held by the Vernacular Club of London, whose goals for a revival had originally been opposed by MacDiarmid, but were now wholeheartedly embraced by him.

Between MacDiarmid's editorial commentary in S.C. and his early poetry there is a great deal of free interchange, with whole lines of his journalistic prose often incorporated wholesale into his poetry. In his satire of a traditional Burns Supper from A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, which begins,

> You canna gang to a Burns supper even
> Wi'oot some wizened scrunt o' a knock-knee
> Chinee turns roon to say, 'Him Haggis - velly goot!'
> And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney.
>
> No' wan in fifty kens a wurd Burns wrote
> But misapplied is a'body's property,
> And gin there was his like alive the day
> They'd be the last a kennin' haund to gi'e - ... (C.P. I, p.84)

there appears toward the end of the passage the lines, "As G.K. Chesterton heaves up to gi'e/The Immortal Memory' in a huge eclipse". This is only one of many possible examples of the way in which MacDiarmid's journalistic work becomes grist for the mill

of his poetry.

Despite MacDiarmid's criticism of groups such as the Burns Clubs, the fact remains that it was through their existence that any writing in the vernacular, any publishing of texts, and, indeed, any reading of poetry, had continued to find a public place in Scotland. What is more, it was through such groups as these maintaining an interest in the language that the conditions necessary for the appreciative reception of MacDiarmid's own work were made possible. Preceding MacDiarmid's own achievement there had already been considerable activity in the vernacular, and the poetry of such writers as Marion Angus, Charles Murray and Violet Jacob, showed that a new creativity was seeking an outlet in Scots.[6] Similarly, Robert Louis Stevenson's Underwoods (1887) revealed a fresh approach to writing poetry in the vernacular. Stevenson, in the preface to that volume, pointed out that he had used Scots, "not caring if it hailed from the Mearns or Galloway: if I had ever heard a good word, I used it without shame", a practice which is identical to MacDiarmid's own. MacDiarmid, however, did recognize what had been accomplished by these earlier poets, for he wrote, "Charles Murray and Violet Jacob - like their forerunners J. Logie Robertson ('Hugh Haliburton') and 'J.B. Selkirk' (James Brown 1832-1904) - may be regarded as the heralds of the new vernacular revival".[7] What really distinguished MacDiarmid from these earlier

[6]Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), p.279. In commenting on the above mentioned poets, Wittig writes, "Their work is predominantly rural, and there is much traditional matter in it: but they have stopped handling this matter in cliches, and develop it creatively.... In retrospect, the generation of the beginning of this century looks as if it were struggling to cast a skin that had grown too tight, as if it were aware of self-imposed limitations and were getting ready for something greater, more daring, to come".

[7]"The Present Condition of Scottish Arts and Affairs" (written as "Special Correspodent") in The Stewartry Observer, 24 Nov., 1927, p.2. Quoted in Duncan Glen's Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1964), p.60.

writers was that their poetry was much more readily identifiable with traditional Scots verse, while what MacDiarmid was after was a poetry written in the vernacular which would fulfil Hardy's definition of literature as being "'the written expression of revolt against accepted things'" (S.C., Feb., 1923, pp.182-3).

The fact that an interest in the language had continued to find some kind of literary outlet was what made a revival of Scots a possibility, and what MacDiarmid added to those conditions was the drive and impetus of an eclectic intellect and an original poetic voice. The complex interrelationship of written and spoken language, social and economic conditions, literary commentary and criticism, and the diverse personalities involved, which went to make up this new movement requires a great deal more research, but what is without question is that MacDiarmid's creative contribution to this movement was the realization of lyrics which were of such freshness and ease that they seemed to have sprung forth Minerva-like from the vernacular itself. Yet, of their modernity and distinctiveness there was no doubt. Gone were the Romantic excesses which had plagued so much Scots verse and in their place was an economy and starkness which carried all the assault of originality.

It was because MacDiarmid felt that the vernacular had capacities for expression not available to English that he placed his faith in the possibilities of his native dialect. The vernacular had to be possessed of some kind of linguistic uniqueness, for, MacDiarmid warned potential writers,

> ... (if the Doric has not certain qualities which no other language possesses and qualities at that of consequence to modern consciousness as a whole) - then all that can be hoped for is a multiplication of equivalents in the vernacular to work that has already been better achieved in other languages without any special contributions at all from Scotland to the expressive resource of modern life (p.183).

MacDiarmid drew attention to the Irish revival to support his

case for the potential of Scots. Quoting an unidentified writer, he stated that, "'the best work done in Gaelic reveals a part of Irish life that has been long silent, with a freshness due to sources that have remained comparatively uninfluenced by alien imagination'" (S.C., March, 1923, p.210). Literature in Ireland, continued MacDiarmid, had been produced by those with "'an educated knowledge of the tongue'" which had affected even "'the distinctiveness of their work in English'" (p.210). The revival of Scots was being hampered, claimed MacDiarmid, because no equivalent educational movement was taking place in Scotland, consequently, "the majority of writers in the vernacular have only a patois knowledge of it" and this factor more than anything was restricting their efforts to "a little range of conventional forms" (p.210). A lack of real knowledge about the vernacular had resulted, MacDiarmid wrote, in a loss of "word-forming faculties peculiar to the Doric ..." (p.211).

MacDiarmid was to insist that Scots, like Irish, was full of idiom which expressed perceptions unfamiliar to modern -- particularly urbanized -- consciousness. "There are words and phrases in the vernacular", he wrote, "which thrill me with a sense of having been produced as a result of mental processes entirely different from my own and much more powerful. They embody observations of a kind which the modern mind makes with increasing difficulty and weakened effect" (p.211). The vernacular, explained MacDiarmid, described "natural occurrences and phenomena of all kinds which have/apparently never been noted by the English mind. No words exist for them in English. For instance - watergaw - for an indistinct rainbow; yow-trummle meaning the cold-weather in July after the sheepshearing; cavaburd - meaning a thick fall of snow; and blue bore - meaning a patch of blue in a cloudy sky" (p.211).

The word which begins this list of the expressive capacities of Scots, is the title of what is generally recognized to be MacDiarmid's first poem in the vernacular, "The Watergaw",

> Ae weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle
> I saw yon antrin thing,
> A watergaw wi' its chitterin' licht
> Ayont the on-ding;
> An' I thocht o' the last wild look ye gied
> Afore ye deed!
>
> There was nae reek i' the laverock's hoose
> That nicht - an' nane i' mine;
> But I hae thocht o' that foolish licht
> Ever sin' syne;
> An' I think that mebbe at last I ken
> What your look meant then. (C.P. I, p.17)

To contrast the effect he was achieving in Scots with the same idea expressed in English, MacDiarmid provided a paraphrase (albeit a poor one) of his poem: "One wet afternoon (or early evening) in the cold weather in July after the sheep-shearing I saw that rare thing - an indistinct rainbow, with its shivering light above the heavily falling rain" (S.C., Oct., 1922, p.63). Idiomatic effect, MacDiarmid was to emphasize, was central to his lyric. "Watergaw" not only had no equivalent in English, but was free of the stock associations implicit in "rainbow". But idiom also gives to this poem an essential blurring of edges, which is a fine poetic complement to its ambiguity. MacDiarmid gives no explanation of "the last wild look" or its connection with the "watergaw" or the synthesis of the two into the unexplained, "I ken/What your look meant then". The poem, MacDiarmid commented, had a "distinctively Scottish sinisterness" about it, and although at the time of its publication in S.C. he labelled it "a bit of studio-work", "a first attempt", the work has retained its freshness of perception. (S.C., Oct., 1922, p.63)

As MacDiarmid began to receive a positive response to his lyrics in Scots, he continued to develop a commentary on his own work, evolving from that what was to constitute the most important editorials of S.C., "A Theory of Scots Letters".[8] It was in this theory that MacDiarmid set out the aesthetic and philosophical foundation of a cultural revival. In describing the critical attitude he intended to adopt, MacDiarmid wrote that the enquiry would be conducted in terms of the ideas presented in an essay by Orage, "Criteria of Culture" (S.C., Feb., 1923, p.180). Quoting directly from that essay, MacDiarmid wrote,

> 'Culture I define as being, amongst other things, a capacity for subtle discriminations of words and ideas. Epictetus made the discrimination of words the foundation of moral training, and it is true enough that every stage of moral progress is indicated by the degree of our perception of the meaning of words ... exercises in culture are elementary however, in comparison with the master-problem of 'disinterestedness'. No word in the English language is more difficult to define or better worth attempting to define. Somewhere or other in its capacious folds it contains all the ideas of ethics, and even, I should say, of religion. I venture to say that whoever has understood the meaning of 'disinterestedness' is not far-off understanding the goal of human culture'... (pp.180-1).

This restatement of the principles of Matthew Arnold's criticism had a particular appeal for MacDiarmid, for not only was the emphasis Orage places here on the fine "discrimination" of words in accord with the way in which MacDiarmid had begun to use Scots, but the focus on "disinterestedness", the word Arnold had used to describe the nature of the classical period, defined for MacDiarmid a characteristic of his native literary tradition.

[8]The theory was serialized in S.C. in three parts; Feb. 1923, pp.180-1, March 1923, pp.210-14 and April 1923, pp.240-4.

MacDiarmid expanded on the term as follows,

> Nationalism in literature is the reaction of a distinctive essential of the spirit to the various/ time influences to which it is subjected. And that which gives a recognizable if hardly definable unity to the work of all true Scottish writers, whether in English or the Vernacular, is a quality of 'disinterestedness' in the sense in which Orage uses it (p.181).

According to MacDiarmid, "disinterestedness" is a quality of impartiality, a quality which distinguishes the best of Scottish literature. This "distinctive essential" of the Scots tradition could be specifically located in the way in which the native tradition used antithesis. Antithesis, the bringing into play of discordant materials, guaranteed the freedom from bias which was the unique quality of "disinterestedness". Antithetical movement, the play of opposites, MacDiarmid claimed, was the distinguishing feature of Scottish literature.

MacDiarmid went on to claim authoritative support for his view by citing Gregory Smith's work, Scottish Literature: Character and Influence (1919). In this work, MacDiarmid pointed out, the author had written, "there is more in the Scottish antithesis of the real and fantastic than is to be explained by the familiar rules of rhetoric" (p.18). Gregory Smith did not in fact put as positive an emphasis on antithesis as an aesthetic element as MacDiarmid proceeds to do in his theory, but he did highlight a recurrent quality in Scottish works. "The Scottish Muse", wrote Gregory Smith, "... though she has loved reality, sometimes to maudlin affection for the commonplace ... has also loved not less the airier pleasure to be found in the confusion of the senses, in the fun of things thrown topsy-turvy, in the horns of elfland and the voices of the mountains. It is a strange union of opposites...." (p.19). This antagonism was felt by Gregory Smith to be an essential part of the Scottish character, for the Scot, he wrote, " ... has a fine

sense of the value of provocation, and in the clash of things and words has often found a spiritual tonic" (p.19). This "constitutional liking for contrasts", Gregory Smith explained, was not to be dismissed as mere "contrariety", nor was it to be confused with "the simple reversing experience" found in Swift and Voltaire. (p.36) The "sudden jostling of contraries" where opposites invade each other without warning, "the easy passing in Scottish literature between the natural and the supernatural", were what was to be identified as the "'polar twins' of the Scottish muse" (p.36).

The double mood in Scots literature which allowed opposites to blend imperceptibly was not dissimilar in method, Gregory Smith noted, to the poetry of Coleridge where "magic and reality" were similarly interwoven. (p.37) But in Scots poetry the "desire to express not merely the talent of close observation, but the power of producing by a cumulation of touches, a quick and perfect image on the reader" is achieved primarily through the "zest for handling a multitude of details..." (p.5). Such a technique was most identifiable in the old flyting form of the mediaeval makars, for there, Gregory Smith observed, the completed effect was "one of movement" (pp.15-16). This emphasis on the creative stimulus to be found in the works of poets such as Henryson, Dunbar and Gavin Douglas, was another aspect of Gregory Smith's work which was directly complementary to what MacDiarmid had been advocating, for he had repeatedly emphasized the need to re-absorb the mediaeval tradition into contemporary writing. Similarly, the direct association between Scottish literature and Scottish character which Gregory Smith had drawn was a way of delineating the psychology of the race in a way in which MacDiarmid had insisted was necessary if there was to be a cultural revival, and that encapsulation of the Scottish psyche as one which delighted in "the absolute propriety of a gargoyle's grinning at the elbow of a kneeling saint", was peculiarly sympathetic to MacDiarmid's view of things.

Gregory Smith's understanding of Scottish character and literature provided the kind of new interpretation of his native culture MacDiarmid had pleaded for in the early editorials of S.C., and that this was the case is evident in the way in which Gregory Smith's concepts were to prove creatively cathartic for MacDiarmid. The explanation of antithetical form as the distinctive Scottish aesthetic had been given a term by Gregory Smith -- The Caledonian Antisyzygy -- a term which MacDiarmid adopted wholesale, and which has now become a critical cliché in relation to his own poetry.

The identification of distinct psychological qualities which revealed antithetical process as its essential element was to be related by MacDiarmid to what the new psychiatry had been attempting to define -- the double-sided quality of consciousness. Because he felt that dialect had preserved perceptions which in the course of time had been repressed in more formal language, MacDiarmid was able to identify parallels between the expressive capacities of the vernacular and the nature of the unconscious mind. Scots vernacular combined reality and fantasy in a way which suggested to MacDiarmid that intense engagement with dialect might well open up new understandings of the process of mind. Thus, a vernacular revival might well be of universal significance.

The way to realize the universal possibilities of the language, MacDiarmid recognized, had to be by locating the general in the particular and that was justification enough for him that a Scottish Renaissance had to be initiated. In the pages of S.C., MacDiarmid announced that Scotland was about to witness the greatest cultural awakening of its history. He wrote,

> We base our belief in the possibility of a great Scottish Literary Renaissance deriving its strength from the resources that lie latent and almost unsuspected in the Vernacular upon the fact that the genius of our Vernacular enables us to secure with comparative ease the very effects and swift transitions which other literatures are for the most part unsuccessfully endeavouring to cultivate in languages that have a very different and inferior bias... (S.C., Feb., 1923, p.182).

This revival, MacDiarmid asserted, was to be no "mere renewed vogue of the letter", but the kind of spiritual awakening which would be of "consequence to modern consciousness as a whole" (p.183).

The cultural renaissance MacDiarmid proposed in S.C. smacks very strongly of the influence and enthusiasm generated by N.A. in its pre-war days, when the term "renaissance" itself, as was pointed out, was being freely used. In the immediate post-war period the appearance of the works of Eliot and Joyce, works which seemed to signal a complete break with the past and the opening up of completely different directions in literature, were interpreted by MacDiarmid as being indicative that some new and larger order was beginning to emerge. Joyce's work in particular was to be related by MacDiarmid to the vernacular. He wrote,

> We have been enormously struck by the resemblance - the moral resemblance - between Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language and James Joyce's Ulysses. A vis comica that has not yet been liberated lies bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric: and its potential uprising would be no less prodigious, uncontrollable, and utterly at variance with conventional morality than was Joyce's tremendous outpouring (p.183).

The importance of Joyce's work, MacDiarmid saw, was that it admitted to literature the chaos, frenzy and absurdity that was the true life of the unconscious. Joyce had insisted on showing that man's consciousness was no static entity, but an irrational, energetic, unexplored force, still in the process of developing.

The representation of the mind and spirit of man which Joyce had given expression to was something, according to MacDiarmid, which was not to be found in the English tradition. That literature, claimed MacDiarmid, belonged to an age which had held to the ideals of progress and rationalism, but that period in history was past, and that order was now seen to be, as so many Victorian reformers had recognized it was, an overly-repressive one in which the spiritual side of the mass of men found little outlet. The English

tradition was, to MacDiarmid, morally and formally restrictive and had utterly failed to express that sense of teeming, sensual life to which Joyce had given free reign and which MacDiarmid saw was the distinctive mark of Scots vernacular.

The essential difference between Scots and English was that the former had retained a brash and resilient sense of the fullness of the physical world, for, MacDiarmid wrote,

> ... part of its very essence, is its insistent recognition of the body, the senses ... in other words, in Meredith's phrase, the vernacular can never consent to 'forfeit the beast wherewith we are crost'. This explains the unique blend of the lyrical and the ludicrous in primitive Scots sentiment. It enables us to realize very clearly just what Mr. Arnold meant when he called Burns 'a beast with splendid gleams'- and the essence of the genius of the race is, in our opinion, the reconciliation it effects between the base and the beautiful, recognising they are complementary and indispensable to each other... (p.184).

Scots expressed, for MacDiarmid, the sound, shape and colour of life in a way that suggested an intimate interchange between language and the natural world. Alive with a wealth of expression to describe seasonal change, insistent, often to the point of grossness, on the sheer physicality of the body, bursting with rhythmic nuance and a great mass of unexploited natural metaphor, the vernacular had all those qualities which Pater characterized as the attraction of Greek Doric. That language, Pater wrote, had "a primitive copiousness and energy for wind, water, cold and sound - attesting a deep susceptibility to the impression of these things, yet with edges most often melting into each other", and he felt that Doric expressed more adequately the fluidity and process of life than the abstract and formal language of his own day, to the degree that he

would have wished Western civilization rebuilt on pagan Dionysian origins.[9]

While MacDiarmid claimed that he found in dictionaries like Jamieson's lost elements of dialect and used these in his early lyrics, he also asserted that he wrote out of a living language and stated that the success of his work was due to the fact that he used colloquialisms and idioms which he heard all around him: "I was born", he stated, "into a Scots-speaking community and my own parents and all those around spoke Scots".[10] The Scots with which MacDiarmid was familiar was not only an oral language which had never to any large extent been formalized into commonly accepted rules of grammar and spelling, it was also essentially a rural language which expressed an agrarian way of life, not as a pastoral ideal, but as a working and everyday

[9]"A Study of Dionysos: The Spiritual Form of Fire and Dew" in Greek Studies (1895 rpt. London: MacMillan, 1914), p.34. Pater explored Doric as the language of the Dionysian cult and in its myths recognized that consciousness was portrayed there as part of natural flux. This representation of consciousness was one to be set against the characterization of mind as imitation of ideal form which Plato had proposed in Phaedrus. These two opposing concepts were described by Pater as the Dionysian and the Apollonian, and he argued that the "fluid" naturalism of the Dionysian was still to be found in nineteenth-century culture in Christian countries "least adulterated by modern ideas". This same Apollonian/Dionysian antithesis was developed by Nietzsche and will be discussed in detail in Part Two.

[10]Quoted in Walter Perrie, Hugh MacDiarmid: Metaphysics and Poetry (Hamilton: Lothlorien, 1975).

reality.[11] It was from this linguistic background that MacDiarmid's early Scots lyrics were produced, and as they began to appear in print, it became evident that MacDiarmid was reformulating the language in the most innovatory of ways, while at the same time preserving and capitalizing on its distinctiveness.

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[11]Douglas Young, 'Plastic Scots' and the Scottish Literary Tradition (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1948), p.17. Douglas Young also pointed out that another source of MacDiarmid's knowledge of dialect was Sir James Wilson's Lowland Scots (1915) and Dialects of Central Scotland (1926). Wilson's dictionary, Young stated, "shows that this vocabulary was in use in some of our small burghs and landward areas, in Strathearn and about the Firth of Forth, a mere quarter of a century ago when MacDiarmid was writing".

Chapter Five

The Early Lyrics

The lyrics which appeared in S.C. formed the bulk of the content of MacDiarmid's first two collections, Sangschaw (1925) and Penny Wheep (1926), works which established MacDiarmid as a new poetic force and in which the distinctiveness of his style and his potential for development are very much in evidence.

Despite the fact that these poems are clearly modern in form, what lies directly behind them is the traditional ballad. Although the collection includes several long poems, the majority of the lyrics are, like "The Watergaw", short pieces which in characteristic balladic style present a single situation of dramatic intensity, what has been described as the propensity of the ballad to tell a story beginning in "the fifth act".[1] Strict economy of vocabulary, an easy familiarity of tone, as well as such standard techniques of the ballad as repetition, echoing and parallelism are presented in these lyrics mainly within the traditional structure of the four-line stanza and the tetrameter line.

These short poems do not have the usual flattering intimacy which is the hallmark of the lyric. Instead, there is a certain impersonality, which instead of detracting, adds to the intensity of the experience being conveyed because it assumes a certain public stance which takes as a given the shared nature of the experience. Such a technique is common in the ballad, where, complemented by the earthiness of the vernacular, it is felt to express "folk imagination".[2]

[1] M.J.C. Hodgart, The Ballads (London: Hutchinson, 1962), p.10.

[2] Hodgart, p.33. Hodgart makes the point that ballads always represent a particular way of "living and thinking" and are usually the expression of small, distinctive communities. The values expressed in ballads, he states, are always collective in nature and represent the communal "folk-imagination".

This element of an informing communal psyche is very strong in these early poems and gives a picture of a self-contained way of life. The matter-of-fact presentation of life and death which recurs consistently is part of that way of life and suggests a view of existence which is essentially indifferent to orthodox religious explanation. Again, this is an attitude derived from the ballad which is a pagan form of poetry and from which Christian doctrine and values are almost always absent. The Scottish ballad in particular, has been singled out as the form least susceptible to the natural merging of pagan and Christian influences found in most mediaeval literature, with what little Christianising of the form that did take place being seen as merely gratuitous.[3]

The presence of a transcendental world is an elemental feature of the ballad, but as would follow from the above, in the Scottish ballad this world, inhabited as it is with ghosts, witches and fairies, and with birds and animals which have human characteristics, is always primarily pagan. The original emotions and attitudes once associated with such a primitive world and which in their day formed part of a larger world picture are no longer fully understood, yet ballad often touches elements in the subconscious which are all too often disturbing.[4] It is this sense of the primitive which MacDiarmid

[3]Hodgart, p.129. Hodgart explains that "Christianity does not appear to have modified the background of the Scottish ballad.... Although the supernatural is so much manifest, there are almost none of the orthodox miracles or legends of the Virgin Mary and the Saints which make up such a large part of mediaeval literature".

[4]Hodgart, p.35. Hodgart writes that beliefs found in ballads were part of "a mythology once quite coherent but which became fragmentary through the passage of time", with the result that while the origins of such beliefs can only be guessed at, their significance is still lodged at an unconscious level.

evokes in these poems and which gives to them their sense of familiarity in strangeness.

The demarcation line between death and life, animal and human, natural and supernatural which is so often blurred in the ballad, accounts for the simultaneous representation of real and ideal which Gregory Smith identified as"The Caledonian Antisyzygy". Similarly, the element of the "grotesque" can also be located within the ballad tradition as simply an acceptable representation of the pagan supernatural. The continuity of the natural cycle is the predominant theme of ballad where the extinction of human life is often presented as an ironic contrast to natural continuity. In "Farmer's Death" it is exactly this kind of traditional representation which is being used,

> Ke-uk, ke-uk, ke-uk, ki-kwaik,
> The broon hens keckle and bouk,
> And syne wi' their yalla beaks
> For the reid worms houk.
>
> The muckle white pig at the tail
> O' the midden slotters and slorps,
> But the auld ferm hoose is lown
> And wae as a corpse.
>
> The hen's een glitter like gless
> As the worms gang twirlin' in,
> But there's never a move in by
> And the windas are blin'.
>
> Feathers turn fire i' the licht,
> The pig's doup skinkles like siller,
> But the auld ferm hoose is waugh
> Wi' the daith intill her.
>
> Hen's cries are a panash in Heaven,
> And a pig has the warld at its feet;
> But wae for the hoose whaur a buirdly man
> Crines in a windin' sheet. (C.P. I, p.34)

Here domestic realism and human death are dramatically juxtaposed, the farmer "Crines in a windin' sheet" while the hens peck for worms

and a pig feeds at the trough. The striking, colourful imagery of this poem is reminiscent of a technique in ballad where the simultaneous realization of two contrasted states, it has been noted, is often accompanied by "brilliant pictorial imagery" which serves to heighten dramatic effect.[5] In MacDiarmid's poem, the farmyard animals, the "broon hens", the "white pig" and even the "reid worms", are particularized through colour. The solidifying effect of colour is further enhanced by the associated description of reflected tones being rendered in hard concrete images. Thus, in the light the pig's back "skinkles like siller", the hen's eyes "glitter like gless" and "feathers turn fire". These optically dazzling descriptions have their complementary counterpart in the rhythm of the piece, where again traditional elements such as alliteration and onomatopoeia are to the fore; the pig "slotters and slorps", the hens "keckle and bouk" and "houk" for worms. The visual and sound effects in this poem combine successfully to create that sense of fevered and predatory activity which is an essential contrast to the absolute stillness of the farmhouse. The description of the house itself is spare and colourless -- "its windas are blin' ", There is "never a move in by" -- and this acts as a perfect counterpoise to the extravagance of the description of the farmyard life which continues unchecked by the circumstances. The whole movement towards the dramatic climax is, as in the traditional ballad, held carefully in check until the last line where the sense of foreboding and doom which has been building up throughout is released in the description of the farmer's corpse, where the so aptly chosen colloquial "crines" sums up the shrivelling and shrinking process of decay.

The simultaneous presentation in this short piece of the inevitability of death and the continuity of life is left unameliorated by any religious explanation. This acceptance of the inevitable process of life without any promise of an eternal hereafter, recurs throughout

[5] Hodgart, p.44.

these early lyrics and is to be found in such poems as "The Fairmer's Lass", "Ex Vermibus", "The Diseased Salmon, "Wheelrig" and several others. The tragic sense of life which permeates the traditional ballad is carried into MacDiarmid's early lyrics, and sometimes, as in the case of "Empty Vessel", his poem rests on an earlier work. Here is the relevant part of the ballad "Jenny Nettles",

> I met ayont the Kairney,
> Jenny Nettles, Jenny Nettles,
> Singing till her bairny,
> Robin Rattle's bastard;
> To flee the dool upo' the stool,
> And ilka ane that mocks her,
> She round about seeks Robin out,
> To stap it in his oxter.[6]

MacDiarmid's version is as follows,

> I met ayont the cairney
> A lass wi' tousie hair
> Singin' till a bairnie
> That was nae langer there.
>
> Wunds wi' warlds to swing
> Dinna sing sae sweet,
> The licht that bends owre a' thing
> Is less ta'en up wi't. (C.P. I, p.66)

By condensing the language of the original into one four-line stanza, MacDiarmid not only gives a new simplicity and strength to the old ballad, but he also converts the pathos and comedy of the original into a true tragic dimension. By simple juxtaposition of his two stanzas he sets the girl's song about the loss of her baby against the force of an indifferent cosmos in which "Wunds wi' warlds to swing" and "The licht that bends owre a' thing", bear no real comparison with her individual suffering, and by extension, the human situation.

The perspective MacDiarmid adopts in the second stanza of this poem, his being able to see the world from the vantage of inter-

[6]Quoted in Kenneth Buthlay, Hugh MacDiarmid: (Christopher Murray Grieve) (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964) Writers and Critics Series, pp.32-3. Buthlay points out that the source of the ballad is Herd's Ancient and Modern Scots Songs (1769).

stellar space, has been described as his "cosmogonical" view.[7] It is this perspective which gives these lyrics their striking modernity, and was one quite likely developed from MacDiarmid's early interest in astronomy. As with his poems dealing with simple domestic scenes, when MacDiarmid uses his cosmogonical view, it is most often accompanied by the sense of a cosmos very much in motion; winds have "warlds to swing", "Time/whuds like a flee", the day rises up and "plunks the sun i' the lift," earth is "littered wi' larochs o' Empires" and "glitters beneath the seas o' Space". This technique is seen at its best in "Somersault" where the universe is turned topsy-turvy,

> I lo'e the stishie
> O' Earth in space
> Breengin' by
> At a haliket pace.
>
> A wecht o' hills
> Gangs wallopin' owre,
> Syne a whummlin' sea
> Wi' a gallus glower.
>
> The West whuds doon
> Like the pigs at Gadara
> But the East's aye there
> Like a sow at the farrow. (C.P. I, p.47)

Not only does this lyric give the sense of MacDiarmid's love of motion, but there is also a kind of domestication of the heavens taking place, for the movement of the earth as it spins on its axis is compared to feeding time at the trough.

The cosmic familiarity evident in "Somersault" as jeu d'esprit is, however, in "Bonnie Broukit Bairn", presented with an inherent protest,

> Mars is braw in crammasy,
> Venus in a green silk goun
> The auld mune shak's her gowden feathers,
> Their starry talk's a wheen o' blethers,
> Nane for thee a thochtie sparin',
> Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn!
> - But greet, an' in your tears ye'll droun
> The haill clanjamfrie. (C.P. I, p.17)

[7] Buthlay, p.15.

The Mars/Venus imagery in this lyric owes a debt to Gavin Douglas's "The Palice of Honour" and MacDiarmid's poem, like Douglas's admonishment, is an eloquent reminder of the need to attend to the neglected child Earth, of the need to cultivate our garden.[8]

The childlike, faery-story quality evident in the above lyric is a device frequently employed by MacDiarmid when he wants to present more serious and complex ideas against a background of surface simplicity, as he does in "Moonstruck",

> When the warl's couped soon' as a peerie
> That licht-lookin craw o' a body, the moon,
> Sits on the fower cross-win's
> Peerin' a' roon'.
>
> She's seen me - she's seen me - an' straucht
> Loupit clean on the quick o' my hert.
> The quhither o' cauld gowd's fairly
> Gi'en me a stert.
>
> An' the roarin' o' oceans noo'
> Is peerieweerie to me:
> Thunner's a tinklin' bell: an' Time
> Whuds like a flee. (C.P. I, p.24)

The bedtime-story opening of the poem with its hide-and-seek game of playing with the image of the moon, expressed in child's language and with the image of a child's toy, a "peerie", is suddenly inverted in the last stanza to an awakening and awareness of the experience of the infinity of time and space, and the whole makes for a fine fusion of the distance between innocence and experience.

Several of MacDiarmid's early lyrics are adaptations (rather than translations) of works from European sources; "You know not who I am" is "After the German of Stefan George"; "The Dead Liebknecht is from the "German of Rudolf Leonhardt"; "Under the Greenwood Tree", "The Three Fish" and "The Robber" are "After the Cretan" and "On the Threshold" is "suggested by the French of Gustave Kahn". Most of these poems are taken from contemporary

[8] The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld, ed. John Small (Edinburgh: Paterson, 1874), I, pp.18-30. The section of the poem which deals with the description of Venus and her court through to the description of Mars, in which green and "Cramessie satyne" are the robes of the Gods and their attendants suggests MacDiarmid is drawing on this source. Not only is "Cramessie" a sufficiently unusual word to indicate a borrowing, but, despite the great difference in length, the theme of the two works is the same.

anthologies of translations, with MacDiarmid adapting them freely to his own purposes and in the process often vivifying lyrics which had been pedantically rendered.[9] His adaptation of Merezhkovsky's "The Trumpet Call" shows very clearly his ability to breathe life into a poem by rendering it in the vernacular. The translation reads,

> Over earth awakes a whirring,
> And a rustling, and a stirring,
> Trumpet-voices fill the skies:
> 'Lo, they call us. Brothers, rise!'
> 'No. The Darkness holds unshaken.
> I will sleep, and not awaken.
> Do not rouse me. Do not call,
> Do not strike the coffin-wall'.
>
> 'Now you dare not sleep. Resounding
> Sternly, the last trump is sounding.
> They are rising from the tomb.
> As from the maternal womb
> Of the opened earth forth-flinging,
> From their graves the dead are springing'.
>
> 'No I cannot. All unuttered
> My words died. My eyes are shuttered.
> I shall not believe their lies.
> I shall not, I cannot rise!
> Brother, - I am ashamed and shrinking, -
> Dust, corruption, - rotting, stinking!'
>
> 'Brother, God has seen our prison.
> All shall wake, and all be risen.
> All shall yet be judged by Him.
> Cherubim and Seraphim
> High the holy throne are bearing!
> Brother, he must live who dies.
> Glad or grieving, thou shalt rise.'[10]

[9]The main sources of MacDiarmid's adaptations are as follows;
Modern Russian Poetry, trans. Babette Deutsch and A. Yarmolinsky, (London: Bodley Head, 1923).
Contemporary German Poetry, trans. Babette Deutsch and A. Yarmolinsky, (London: Bodley Head, 1923).
Dmitry Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature: 1881-1925 (London: Routledge, 1926).

[10]Modern Russian Poetry, pp.185-6.

Taking his title from a line of the translation, "the last trump", this is how MacDiarmid realizes the poem,

> Owre the haill warl' there's a whirrin'
> An' a reishlin' an' a stirrin'
> An' a muckle voice that cries:
> 'Let aal men rise!'
>
> 'Na, Na! Still the nicht is black.
> I'll sleep on an' winna wauk.
> Dinna reeze me. Dinna ca'
> Chapna' on my coffin-wa''.
>
> 'Fegs, ye canna sleep, for noo
> Gabriel makes a hullaballoo.
> Hark his trumpet's awfu' toot,
> A' the deid maun up an' oot'.
>
> Tootle-ootle-ootle-oo.
> Tootle-oo
>
> 'Gawa', gawa', an' let me lig,
> Nae God 'ud awn me i' this rig
> Or ha'e sic a rotten, stinkin'
> Corpse as mine in's sunlicht blinkin'.
>
> Gawa', gawa'.' 'Na, Na, my freen!
> In yer grave ye're no' unseen.
> Black affrontit tho' ye be
> Up ye get - it's God's decree!
>
> Up an' oot - an' say nae mair
> Gleg or laith's no' here nor there.
> Up - or God's begood to speir
> Gin a' body's here!' (C.P. I, p.29)

The work gains a great deal from MacDiarmid's adaptation, not least through the introduction of a humorous element which leavens the Resurrection theme. The use of the vernacular is a solid contrast to the high-blown rhetoric of the Deutsch/Yarmolinsky translation and its rich onomatopoeia, the "whirrin'/An' a reishlin' an' a stirrin'" injects movement and motion into the lines in a way which is much more directly complementary to the notion of the great

awakening on Judgement Day. Again, domestic familiarity is foremost in MacDiarmid's poem, where the dialogue is made much more dramatic by being in an everyday language and where the image of the corpse who does not want to rise and be judged is presented as a typical lazy lie-a-bed prepared to dismiss Gabriel himself with his "Chapna' on my coffin-wa'*".

While MacDiarmid's adaptations of works in translation show a clear indication of his interest in foreign sources, he was at the time of writing these lyrics certainly aware and open to contemporary native experiments. In 1921, following the publication of H.J.C. Grierson's edition, interest in the work of the metaphysical poets was revived and became a particular focus of criticism for poets and public through Eliot's essays on the subject. Eliot found in Donne and Marvell's use of antithesis an aesthetic and technique sympathetic to his own use of poetic juxtaposition. Dismissing Johnson's assertion that in their discordia concors the metaphysical poets had indulged "wit" to excess, Eliot argued that that wit was less a "structural decoration" than a way in which thought expressed as wit was "fused into the imagination". ("Andrew Marvell" in Selected Essays, p.296) Just as Gregory Smith had noted in the use of antithesis a continuity between an earlier tradition (the Scottish mediaevalists) and the work of Coleridge, so Eliot made a not dissimilar comparison between the metaphysical poets and Coleridge's concept of the poetic imagination as being "'the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities...'" (p.296). Such an analysis of a traditional form, a form which was also being reabsorbed and being presented as a distinctly "modern" technique, must have provided MacDiarmid with a further reassurance of the appropriateness of his own use of the vernacular.

Yet, MacDiarmid's work has to be distinguished from the metaphysical strain, for his poetry is less a yoking together by violence of discordant images, than a perceiving in the everyday a strangeness and intensity which invests the domestic with cosmic significance, a mode of perception which has been described as "a brilliant apprehension of the material world, seen with an almost mystical intensity".[11] What MacDiarmid does share with the Metaphysicals is the same willingness to exploit themes beyond the traditional to achieve fresh effects, and like Donne, MacDiarmid was not unaware of the fact that the new science would indeed "call all in doubt". Earth and heavens are never treated as separate entities in MacDiarmid's work, but are seen as part of a total and related universe. "The Innumerable Christ" which bears the epigram, "Other stars/have their Bethlehem and their Calvary too",[12] demonstrates the imaginative influence physics was having on MacDiarmid,

> Wha kens on whatna Bethlehems
> Earth twinkles like a star the nicht,
> An' whatna shepherds lift their heids
> In its unearthly licht?
>
> 'Yont a' the stars oor een can see
> An' farther than their lichts can fly,
> I' mony an unco warl' the nicht
> The fatefu' bairnies cry.

[11] David Daiches "Hugh MacDiarmid's Early Poetry", reprinted in Hugh MacDiarmid: a Festschrift, eds. K.D. Duval and Sydney Goodsir Smith (Edinburgh: Duval, 1960), p.27.

[12] The quotation is attributed to Professor J.Y. Simpson whose theology MacDiarmid discusses in the essay "A Russo-Scottish Parallelism".

I' mony an unco warl' the nicht
The lift gaes black as pitch at noon,
An' sideways on their chests the heids
O' endless Christs roll doon.

An' when the earth's as cauld's the mune
An' a' its folk are lang syne deid,
On coontless stars the Babe maun cry
An' the Crucified maun bleed. (C.P. I, p.32)

Involved as closely as he was with N.A., it would have been impossible for MacDiarmid not to have been familiar with Pound's Imagism and Wyndham Lewis' Vorticism. In fact, in a S.C. editorial he quotes Aldington's definition of an image as that which,"'presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'" and adds that such "instantaneous presentation" of an image achieves "a sense of liberation from limits of space and time" which is experienced "in the presence of great art" (S.C., May, 1923, p.271). MacDiarmid recognized that the nature of Imagism was itself defined by opposition -- the presentation in the same "'instant of time'" -- of seemingly antithetical perceptions which, because of being brought together, create a new synthesis, that is, offer an experience of "sudden growth". The antithetical effect inherent in the Scots tradition, the "swift transitions" and juxtapositions, the "taking all things for granted", the "freedom in passing from one mood to another" which Gregory Smith had said were the distinctions of the tradition, were identical to the techniques the Imagists were advocating. The vernacular with its simultaneous "gargoyle" and "saint" images offered this technique ready-made and it is significant that while MacDiarmid was to insistently proclaim Pound's "Make it New" slogan, his own work remained free of the vers libre so consciously pursued by the Imagists as a symbol of their break with the past, and relied instead on the metre and rhyme of his own ballad

tradition.[13] Because the vernacular was spoken speech and therefore had distinctive rhythmic patterns, MacDiarmid found it impossible, and certainly from an artistic point-of-view it would have been counterproductive, to separate sound and sense. What he did do was retain rhythm and rhyme as part of the poetic structure and experimented within traditional metric patterns with the result that in works like "The Eemis Stane" he achieved effects rarely realized even by the best of the Imagists,

> I' the how-dumb-deid o' the cauld hairst nicht
> The warl' like an eemis stane
> Wags i' the lift;
> An' my eerie memories fa'
> Like a yowdendrift.
>
> Like a yowdendrift so's I couldna read
> The words cut oot i' the stane
> Had the fug o' fame
> An history's hazelraw
> No yirdit thaim. (CP. I, p.27)

Here a single image is presented starkly without comment or explanation in a way which fulfils the criteria of Imagist poetry. But the incantatory rhythm of this lyric harks back to the ballad and makes the work alive with a sense of instinctive premonitions and barely understood fears which are transferred directly to the problem of understanding the nature of existence. "The words cut oot i' the stane", suggest there is meaning to be found, perhaps in the very materiality of the earth, but even if the lichens which overgrow the stone, "history's hazelraw" and the "fug o' fame", were not there, even if time and fortune had not obscured the message, it would still be impossible to "read", impossible to grasp and understand.

MacDiarmid's reliance on ballad, his delight in the earthiness of dialect and his acute sense of the appropriateness of the provincial, would suggest a comparison with Hardy, but because of the

[13] Kenneth Buthlay, Hugh MacDiarmid, p.32. In commenting on MacDiarmid's relationship to the Imagist movement, Buthlay writes, "... the imagist group's preoccupation with vers libre cadences did not concern MacDiarmid because he found that in Scots he could achieve fresh and interesting rhythmical effects within the old lyric framework of metre and rhyme. This was to some extent 'maken vertu of necessittee' since the traditional short lyric is the only unbroken tradition in Scots verse, and where rhythm was concerned MacDiarmid was bound to train his ear on this, on folk-song and ballad, and on speech rhythm, any other kind of living continuity being non-existent".

way in which MacDiarmid perceives the natural world, his vision is much closer to that of Hopkins.[14]

Like MacDiarmid, Hopkins was attracted by the expressive capacity and rhythms of dialect and used alliteration and assonance as a means of introducing into his work the sense of immediacy and concreteness he had so admired in Anglo Saxon. Hopkins found the rhythms of Old English in dialect speech and was convinced that rural speech had preserved older words and syntactical forms in a way in which "correct" language had not. Poetic language, Hopkins felt, should be the "current language heightened, to any degree heightened, but not ... an obsolete one" (Letters to Bridges, p.89).[15] From an interest in etymology, Hopkins developed a sense of words which involved him in attempting to respond actively to the uniqueness of words, while at the same time, becoming increasingly aware of the process of language. The relationship between sound and sense suggested to Hopkins the way in which our perceptual responses change, for similarity of sound, he felt, was a key to what linked words metaphorically. (Milroy, p.67) "Crack, creak, croak, crake,

[14]Babette Deutsch, Poetry in Our Time (New York: Holt, 1952), p.307. On the similarities between MacDiarmid and Hopkins, Deutsch wrote, "One suspects that Hopkins with what dismay, would have found in this turbulent lyricist a mind as sympathetic to his own as Whitman's, and a power kindred to his own in the Scotsman's handling of language.... It is not only MacDiarmid's happy use of his native tongue and his folk rhythms that suggest Hopkins. There is also his evident delight in nature's wilder inscapes...."

[15]James Milroy, The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Andrew Deutsch, 1977), p.100. In this fine study, Milroy defines Hopkins's concept of "current language" as follows: "First, it is not the standard model of nineteenth-century poetic diction: second, it is not prose language - the written language of narrative or argument; third, it is not necessarily the language usually associated with logical statement ... current language has that 'living truth and variety'.... It is 'modern speech' in the mouths of speakers - emphatically speech and not writing. In that ordinary speech one can discern underlying pattern and regularity just as one can speak of 'laws' of natural creation - in the shapes and behaviour of clouds, leaf-sprays, bluebells. This current language has a rhythm of its own, and it has sounds that suggest natural sounds, feelings and textures".

graculus, crackle", these words, Hopkins wrote, "must be onomatopoetic" (Entry 24 Sept., 1863, Early Diary: 1863-64).[16] The sound of such words suggested a direct relationship between language and nature and while Hopkins believed, erroneously, that there were universal laws of language which could be discovered and defined, he also saw that the essence of language was change, for language, to Hopkins, was something which constantly evolved to accommodate newly perceived relationships of shape, sound and colour. (Milroy, p.157) The poetic task which presented itself to Hopkins was thus to find a means of conveying his own acute sensual responses through a form which would come closest to where sound was to be discovered, that is, in spoken language, a problem which was resolved to his satisfaction in the development of sprung rhythm, a highly dramatized form of poetry which in order to be fully appreciated has to be read aloud.

Hopkins's awareness of the natural world, his rejoicing in the "swift, slow; sweet, sour: adazzle, dim;" elements of "dappled things", constituted for him an aesthetic in which the particularity of natural objects -- their "individually-distinctive" aspects -- affirmed a world of harmony and order governed by a Christian God. Influenced by the aestheticism of Pater in his Oxford days and converted to Catholicism by Newman, Hopkins saw the universe as composed of contrasting but interconnected elements, the whole of which was infused with the spirit of the Creator. The physical world of being affirmed for Hopkins the existence of a Godhead, and such a conception of the universe found further reinforcement and ecclesiastical sanction for him in the philosophy of John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), whom he described as of "realty the rarest-veined unraveller" ("Duns Scotus's Oxford").[17]

By interpreting the universe as a system of process, as opposed to hierarchical order, Scotus's philosophy had challenged mediaeval

[16] Reprinted in Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose, ed. W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.90.

[17] Gerard Manley Hopkins, p.40.

church doctrine while at the same time reconciling his view to orthodox belief. The universe, to Scotus, was a system of natural objects, each of which had a distinctiveness. Individual objects had qualities which made them that which they are and no other. To this distinctiveness, this "Thisness", Scotus gave the term "haecceitas", and he argued that the science of nature was the material universe, differentiated in terms of formal distinctions -- weight, shape, size and so on.[17] The proper object of philosophy was thus, to Scotus, the study of this real world, free from anything which restricted that study to a single interpretation, including any dogmatic interpretation of the nature of God. God revealed himself, claimed Scotus, not in abstract essences, but in the infinite and concrete variety of the physical world and it was through understanding the particularity of objects in this world, and by implication, the highest object -- man -- that the metaphysical properties of the universe were revealed. Scotus's metaphysics were an attempt to reconcile empirical knowledge with speculative reasoning, an attempt to bring together the worlds of matter and spirit, a metaphysic which appealed particularly to Hopkins for it essentially reconciled his need for a close, intense apprehension of the sensual and the material with his religious vision, the unity of which he expressed as the mystical "inscape".

In later years, MacDiarmid came to recognize his own affinity with Hopkins, both in the use Hopkins had made of older linguistic forms and dialect speech, and in the attractiveness of the philosophy of Hopkins's metaphysical mentor, Scotus. Of Scotus, MacDiarmid wrote,

> ... I am constantly on the qui vive for every trace of that peculiar individuality which Duns Scotus called haecceitas and the distinctio formalis a parte rei, agreeable to his love of objects between which minute distinction can be made - and, further,

[17] Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, trans. and ed. Allan Wolter (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1962), p.166.

> the concrete individuality of each object known in at least a confused way intuitively; every body having not merely a material form but also a vital form; a special element of its being in its activity and movement. I cannot get rid of a certain participation in - or interest in and sympathy with - such Scotist ideas, since I myself am always so intent on the slightest integrity (L.P., p.310).

The kind of metaphysical unity Scotus perceived in the natural world was complementary to MacDiarmid's need for a sense of the whole, for like Hopkins, MacDiarmid's acute apprehension of the everyday seemed to point to some kind of informing vitality.

While it was suggested earlier that consistent with a certain reliance on the ballad tradition, orthodox Christian morality is absent from MacDiarmid's early lyrics, he nevertheless, in his longer poems in these anthologies, uses Christian imagery. However, as in "I Heard Christ Sing", a strong sense of pre-Christian custom is retained. Christ is presented as a centre -- a maypole -- around which dance the twelve apostles,

> ... O I wot it was a maypole,
> As a man micht seek to see,
> Wi' the twal' disciples dancin' roon',
> While Christ sang like a lintie ...

The song Christ sings is for freedom, both his own and man's,

> ... The spirit of man
> Is a bird in a cage,
> That beats on the bars
> Wi' a goodly rage,
> And fain 'ud be free.
>
> Twice-caged it is,
> In life and in death,
> Yet it claps its wings
> Wi' a restless faith,
> And sings as it may ...

The hope expressed is for a Resurrection that will see the spirit of Christ and the spirit of man united as one,

> ... Sweet is the song
> That is lost in its throat,
> And fain 'ud I hear
> Its openin' note,
> As I hang on the rood.

... And when I rise
Again from the dead
Let me, I pray,
Be accompanied
By the spirit of man ...

The poem ends with the Crucifixion which is the act which brings the spirit of God and man together, but what is emphasized is the role of evil in this ultimate act of good, for the final stanza of the poem reads,

> Judas and Christ stude face to face,
> And mair I couldna' see,
> But I wot he did God's will wha made
> Siccar o' Calvary.[18] (C.P. I, pp.18-21)

Judas's betrayal, it is asserted, was an essential part of the working out of Christ's destiny.

This idea of an essential reciprocity between man and God is explored again in "Ballad of the Five Senses", where the central image is that of a tree. The argument of the poem is that released from the subjective experience of the senses, man is capable of a vision of a world to which the present one is "naething but a shaddaw-show", a world where "day and nicht, or life and death/Mair like each ither be". What is perceived through the senses alone, it is made clear, can never be the whole reality,

> Wae's me that thocht I kent the warl',
> Wae's me that made a God,
> My senses five and their millions mair
> Were/like banes beneath a sod.
>
> For the warl' is like a flourishing tree,
> And God is like the sun,
> But they or I to either lie
> Like deid folk i' the grun ...

[18] This poem is dedicated to H.J.C. Grierson to whom MacDiarmid sent the poem for criticism before it was published. Grierson recommended that the following stanza which was originally the fourth stanza be omitted,

> Ane, twa, three, Matthew, Mark and Luke,
> Fower, five, six, Andrew, Thomas and John
> And I wot it was the fairest sicht
> That e'er I looked upon.

(Letter to H.J.C Grierson, 30 April 1925).

What is yearned for is an affirmation of an ideal beyond material limitations, some ideal where human and divine would find appropriate union. He is,

> ... fain for a gowden sun
> And fain for a flourishing tree,
> That neither men nor the Gods they'll ken
> In earth or Heaven sall see! (C.P. I, pp.36-40)

In "Sea Serpent", the image of the tree is replaced by that of a snake, but the theme remains the same, for the constantly changing shape of the serpent in the poem is made to represent the relationship between God and man. In its earliest form, the serpent had "lint-white lines/Brichter than lichtnin's there". The serpent was the initial light of the world which brought order out of chaos. But the serpent "gethered in on itsel' again" until it "mirrored/The ends o' the thocht", that is, the serpent in changing its shape produced conscious life -- man. However, the "mere mak'in o' lives" became simply a "moniplied maze of forms", the central plan or key of which seems to be lost. Nevertheless, the "serpent is movin' still", for it can be experienced as the "link that binds" man to other forms of life and may yet be the means whereby we can "raise a cry that'll fetch God back/To the hert o' His work again", even although "Nature and Man" have become artificially separated, are "Rent in unendin' wars". The possibility that the serpent might be dying of a "mortal wound" is raised, but the poem ends with a eulogizing plea for God to return to man,

> .....
> O Thou that we'd fain be ane wi' again
> Frae the weary lapses o' self set free,
> Be to oor lives as life is to Daith,
> And lift and licht us eternally.
> Frae the howe o' the sea to the heich o' the lift.
> To the licht as licht to the darkness is,
> Spring fresh and fair frae the spirit o' God
> Like the a'e first thocht that He kent was His.

Loup again in His brain, O Nerve,
Like a trumpet-stang,
Lichtnin-clear as when first owre Chaos
Your shape you flang
- And swee his mind till the mapamound
And meanin' o' ilka man,
Brenn as then wi' the instant pooer
O' an only plan. (C.P. I, pp.48-51)

The sense in which the spiritual life of man is seen as essentially a still-developing force which attempts to realize itself through some new engagement with the Divine, which is the theme of all these long poems, constitutes the nature of MacDiarmid's religious sensibility, for while never prepared to be contained within the narrow confines of dogma, MacDiarmid nevertheless sought a unity and continuity with his universe which can be described as religious in the broad sense of the word.

MacDiarmid's concern with the evolutionary nature of consciousness reaches a further stage in the poem "Gairmscoile", the only work in these collections to deal explicitly with Scottish Nationalism. The poem opens with a powerful image of the brute image of man, of two prehistoric monsters copulating,

Aulder than mammoth or than mastodon
Deep i' the herts o' a' men lurk scaut-heid
Skrymmorie monsters few daur look upon.
Brides sometimes catch their wild een, scansin' reid,
Beekin' abune the herts they thocht to lo'e
And horror-stricken ken that i' themselves
A like beast stan's, and lookin' love thro' and thro'
Meets reid een wi' een like seevun hells.
... Nearer the two beasts draw, and, couplin', brak
The bubbles o' twa sauls and the haill world gangs black ...

The poem continues by making a connection between the roaring of the beasts and the nature of primitive language,

Mony's the auld hauf-human cry I ken
Fa's like a revelation on the herts o' men
As tho' the graves were split and the first man
Grippit the latest wi' a freendly han'
... And there's forgotten shibboleths o' the Scots
Ha'e keys to senses lockit to us yet
- Coorse words that shamble thro' oor minds like stots
Syne turns on's muckle een wi' doonsin' emerauds lit.

These beasts in whose "wild cries a' Scotland's destiny thrills", are the "Herds that draw the generation", they are "The spirit o' the race". The beasts were "deemed extinct", but something of their spirit still lives in the hearts and minds of men. What the beasts represent is a primitive energy to be tapped and released in the race, specifically the Scottish race, for the poem goes on to draw comparisons between Scotland and the spirit of national revival in Norway, which, the poem makes clear, was brought about by the nationalist poet Wergeland,

> Wergeland, my warld as thine "ca' canny" cries,
> And daurna lippen to auld Scotland's virr.
> Ah, weel ye kent - as Carlyle quo' likewise -
> Maist folk are thowless fules wha downa stir, (C.P. I,
> Crouse sumphs that hate nane 'bies wha'd wauken them ... pp.72-4)

Identifying himself with Wergeland, MacDiarmid makes the point that he is committed to a similar cause in Scotland, and in the final lines of the poem dismisses all those who criticize his efforts in Scots, saying, "For we ha'e faith in Scotland's hidden poo'ers,/The present's theirs, but A' the past and future's oors".

Under the banner of Nationalism, "Gairmscoile" draws together MacDiarmid's sense of the potential of the "coorse" language of Scots and a vision of regeneration in which the distinctive psychological qualities of his native dialect would be released to effect some kind of new development, and that development, as the themes of the longer poems in these early anthologies make clear is seen by MacDiarmid as essentially one of spiritual unity. But to define the specific course this development might take, MacDiarmid required a broader interpretation of the movement of history, one which would be complementary to his aesthetic concept of antisyzygy, and this he found in the works of Spengler and Nietzsche, and in the course of developments in Russia.

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PART TWO : THE REGENERATIVE VISION

Chapter Six

Spengler and Nietzsche: The Apollo/Dionysos Antithesis

While Gregory Smith's concept of antithesis as the characteristic of the Scots literary tradition gave to MacDiarmid an aesthetical foundation for his Scots revival, it was the broader application of the principles to the historical process itself which MacDiarmid found in the works of Spengler and Nietzsche which led him to see that a cultural awakening in Scotland might be related to larger historical movements.

Events in Russia and in post-war Europe generally were evidence of the fact that change of universal consequence had taken place. As interpreted by Spengler in The Decline of the West, these changes were to be seen as a natural part of the historical cycle. Spengler identified history as a "morphological" process. That is, he extended the Romantic metaphor of organic growth to historical movement, thus defining history as being, not progressive, but like all else in nature, subject to cyclical growth.[1] Like the phases in the development of a plant, civilizations, according to Spengler, became mature or were "fulfilled", decayed and died, and in successive phases were replaced by their antithetical form. Quoting Spengler in his "A Theory of Scots Letters", MacDiarmid pointed out that Spengler had seen that Western civilization had now "fulfilled" itself and that what Spengler had meant by that was that historically we had come to "the end of one civilisation and the beginning of another - the emergence of a new order" (S.C., March, 1923, p.213).

In characterizing historical movement as antithetical process, Spengler used two figures, Apollo and Faust, as representative of the old and new orders respectively. MacDiarmid drew specific

[1] H. Stuart Hughes, Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate (New York: Scribner, 1952), p.10.

attention to this opposition when he wrote,

> Of the many antithesis out of which Herr Spengler builds up his thesis - which is destined to have an incalculable influence upon the future of human literature - that which predominates in every chapter is the distinction he draws between the 'Apollonian' or classical, and the 'Faustian' or modern type... (p.214).

Spengler had argued that the prevailing order of civilization had been built on the foundation of classical culture and was therefore to be identified by the figure who had represented the best of that order -- Apollo. Apollonian order had upheld the rule of reason as its highest goal, but in the modern age there had emerged opposition to the excesses of rationalism. This opposition sprang from the need of the instinctual part of human nature to reassert itself, and was best expressed by a figure closely associated with the hermetic tradition -- Faust. Faustian order characterized a primitive, long-slumbering energy which was about to resurface and displace the controlling order. What had happened in Russia through the uprising of the peasantry would take place, Spengler felt, on a universal level.

MacDiarmid extended Spengler's types to his own purposes. Apollonian man, he wrote, was "dogmatic, unquestioning, instinctive, having no conception of infinity", while his opposite number, Faustian man, was "dominated by the conception of infinity, of the unattainable, and hence is questioning, never satisfied, rationalistic in religion and politics, romantic in art and literature... (p.214). The former, claimed MacDiarmid, was "your average Englishman or German", while the latter, was "a perfect expression of the Scottish race..." (p.214). The era which had seen the order and reason of Apollonian man triumph, continued MacDiarmid, was now waning and would be replaced by a new, vitalising energy which would set different directions for humanity as a whole. This emerging order would be

Faustian and would be recognized as the coming into being of a new kind of spirituality or consciousness. Spengler had located the emergence of this consciousness in the works of Dostoevsky, MacDiarmid claimed that it was also to be found in Scots vernacular.

The Apollo/Faust opposition was therefore not only complementary to MacDiarmid's grasp of aesthetic antithesis, it also gave impetus to his notion that a vernacular revival would be part of a universal cultural awakening. This notion seems to have taken hold of MacDiarmid's imagination, for he was to constantly refer to it in these early years. For example, in a letter he wrote to H.J.C. Grierson, he commented,

> ... braid Scots is now likely to realise some of its tremendous latent potentialities, if only because of that flux of which Oswald Spengler writes in his Downfall of the Western World between Apollonian (in this case English) and Faustian (equivalent here to Scottish) elements, whereby submerged and neglected elements (e.g. Braid Scots) come into their own at the expense of more dominating elements which have completely fulfilled themselves and are bankrupt of any reserve of impredictable [sic] evolution. I have found my surest indication of this in the alignment of the principal qualities of Braid Scots which have hitherto failed to find effective outlet - and to which the stream of English cultural tendency has been overwhelmingly antipathetic - with the significant tendencies emerging in 'advanced' art and thought all over Europe... (12 May, 1925).[2]

Just as Gregory Smith had identified distinctive elements in the literary tradition as being expressions of the Scottish character, so MacDiarmid now used Spengler's categories to distinguish the "fulfilled" and the "Faustian" Scot. The day of the "canny" Scot was over, announced MacDiarmid, and was about to be replaced by a new representative of the race who would be realized through the

[2] The H.J.C. Grierson Papers, National Library of Scotland, Ms.9332.

"freeing and developing of that opposite tendency in our consciousness which runs counter to the conventional conception of what is Scottish ..." (p.214). The task now facing Scots, MacDiarmid declared, was to aid actively the coming of a new world-shaping consciousness by exploring the potential of the vernacular, and the slogan MacDiarmid put forward for the achievement of that end was the Nietzschean mandate, "Become what you are" (p.214).

In the preface to The Decline of the West, Spengler acknowledged that he owed "practically everything" to Nietzsche and Goethe, and indeed Spengler's understanding of the development of historical process is derived primarily from Nietzsche's concept of the evolution of consciousness from the Apollonian/Dionysian conflict. Nietzsche's perception of the origin of consciousness as expressed in art is based on his understanding of the Dionysian cult, which forms the base of his argument in The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music. Like Pater, Nietzsche challenged the idea of classical culture as "sweetness and light". The restrained and balanced classicism found in the harmonious relationships of the architecture and sculpture of Phidias was, to Nietzsche, but one side of the Greek tradition. Such an expression of calm rationality, Nietzsche claimed, was nothing but willed illusion, for what it represented was the imposition of an order, derived not from nature, but from man's consciousness of his mastery over nature. This imposition on the external world of an order which in reality did not exist ignored the fundamental force from which it had developed, for despite its expressions of grace and calm, Greek culture, Nietzsche insisted, rested on an irrational, instinctive energy which was in close contact with nature -- the Dionysian. Thus, for Nietzsche, the true expression of classical culture was to be found, not in static monuments like the Parthenon, but in dramatic tragedy, for in tragedy, Apollo and Dionysos confronted one another.

The Greeks, wrote Nietzsche,

> ... could not disguise from themselves the fact that they were essentially akin to those deposed Titans and heroes. They felt more than that: their whole existence, with its temperate beauty, rested upon a base of suffering and knowledge which had been hidden from them until the re-instatement of Dionysos uncovered it once more ... Apollo found it impossible to live without Dionysos. The elements of titanism and barbarism turned out to be quite as fundamental as the Apollonian element ... let us imagine how the Apollonian artist with his thin, monotonous harp music must have sounded beside the demoniac chant of the multitude! The muses presiding over the illusory arts paled before an art which enthusiastically told the truth, and the wisdom of Silenus cried 'Woe!' against the serene Olympians. The individual, with his limits and moderations, forgot himself in the Dionysian vortex and became oblivious to the laws of Apollo. Indiscreet extravagance revealed itself as truth, and contradiction, a delight born of pain, spoke out of the bosom of nature.[3]

What Nietzsche emphasizes here is that Apollonian culture, despite its great achievements, in the end was forced to recognize in the primitive energy of the Dionysian, a truth larger than anything they themselves had created. The drunken Silenus, stepfather of Dionysos, and a satyr and seer, presented an image of truth, because his own excesses of the flesh were emblematic of the process of nature itself. Existing in isolation, neither of these two modes of life were satisfactory, but when they confronted and cohered in Attic tragedy what was created was a new stage of consciousness.

Nietzsche felt that the Dionysian chorus in tragedy represented to the full, man in his uncultivated state, for what it spoke of was a reality "sanctioned by myth and ritual" (p.50). The chorus, like its aesthetic offspring poetry, was an "... unvarnished expression of the truth" to be set against a mistaken ideal of civilization

[3] The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp.34-5. This work of Nietzsche's was first published in German in 1872, in French in 1901 and in English in 1909.

in which man "... considers himself the only reality" (p.53). Tragedy in its contrast of "the truth of nature" (the Dionysian) and "the pretentious lie of civilization" (the Apollonian) was thus a living expression of the relationship between "the eternal core of things" and the "entire phenomenal world" (p.53). As art, what tragedy offered was "metaphysical solace", for it revealed that being somehow could assert itself in the face of phenomenal change. Tragedy reconciled contradiction, for it affirmed that man, a conscious being who felt spiritually linked to the infinite, yet was part of and subject to the flux of the phenomenal world, could find some unity in "the heart of nature" (p.53). The view that tragedy expressed was that "despite every phenomenal change, life is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful", and this view had its concrete realization in "the chorus of the satyrs, nature beings who dwell behind all civilization and preserve their identity through every change of generation and historical movement" (p.50).

From his understanding of the Dionysian, Nietzsche perceived that man -- physiologically, intellectually and morally -- had emerged from a primal natural energy. All of humanity's highest achievements and moral aspirations had sprung from a source which had continuously been disguised and denied by the imposition of an order derived from Socratic logic. The development of logic marked, according to Nietzsche, a split in the consciousness of man, for what Socrates had represented was "theoretical" man, whose mind was to be seen as distinctively different from that of the artist.(p.92) Contrasting these two, Nietzsche wrote,

> Like the artist, theoretical man takes infinite pleasure in all that exists and is thus saved from the practical ethics of pessimism.... But while the artist, having unveiled the truth garment by garment, remains with his gaze fixed on what is still hidden, theoretical man takes delight in the cast garment and finds his highest satisfaction in the unveiling process itself, which proves to him his own power... (p.92).

"Theoretical" man described the scientific attitude which had been responsible for the growth and development of Western civilization, but such an attitude, to Nietzsche, was a misguided one because it rested on the idea that "thought, guided by the thread of causation, might plumb the farthest abysses of being and even correct it" (p. 93). The disintegration of European culture, Nietzsche believed, was due to the failure of logic and the misplaced trust in the all-powerful capacities of reason. The over-extension of the rational faculty had only resulted in a tyranny of the spirit, and in order to break that tyranny man had, insisted Nietzsche, to face his Dionysian origins once again.

If Socratic logic was not sufficient to explain or contain life's primal energy, neither were the nineteenth-century theories of evolution.[4] To Nietzsche, the condition of life was not random, for he felt that the suffering and striving of the human spirit must have some higher purpose. Man and his consciousness had evolved, claimed Nietzsche, not from a biological survival of the fittest, but by the assertion and channelling of his instinctive energy, his "will-to-power". The exercise of the strength and capacity of will could change the face of life and lead ultimately to the triumphant expression of the human spirit in the creation of a better and higher human being, what Nietzsche was to define as the Superman; "Man", he wrote, "is something which must be overcome".[5]

While Nietzsche's writings were to be received as an imaginative

[4] H.V. Routh, Towards the Twentieth Century: Essays in the Spiritual History of the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: University Press, 1937), pp. 359-60. In examining Nietzsche's philosophy as a backlash to Darwinism and Naturalism, Routh states that Nietzsche sought to emphasize, "'the stupendous formative power which creates from within'" and for that reason gave precedence to the expression of that power over logical thought.

[5] Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.65. First published in German in 1883-5, in French in 1898 and in English in 1896.

corrective to the excesses of scientific determinism in general and biological naturalism in particular, his writings were also to exert some considerable influence on social reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who interpreted Nietzsche as being in sympathy with their own ideals. Nietzsche himself was opposed to all forms of Socialism, seeing them as simply the swan-song of Christianity, but his criticism of over-rational order was completely in accord with those who attacked the injustices of the class system. Certainly, Nietzsche's critique of classical culture was of a piece with the kind of social criticism to be found, for example, in Ruskin, who compared Victorian society with ancient Greece,

> But the modern English mind has this much in common with that of the Greek, that it intensely desires in all things, the utmost completion or perfection compatible with their nature. This is a noble character in the abstract, but becomes ignoble when it causes us to forget the relative dignities of that nature itself ... look round this English room of yours ... examine again all those accurate mouldings, and perfect polishings, and unerring adjustments of the seasoned wood and tempered steel. Many a time you have exulted over them, and thought how great England was, because her slightest work was done so thoroughly. Alas! if read rightly, these perfect-nesses are signs of slavery in our England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek.[6]

Like Morris, Ruskin emphasized that the sense of individual craftsmanship located in such things as the Gothic grotesque, was indicative of a society in which the human spirit had had a greater freedom of expression, and was, therefore, a better model for contemporary Britain than classical Greece or Rome.

[6]"The Nature of Gothic" in Vol. II of The Stones of Venice (1851-3 rpt. New York: Wiley, 1888), p.160. This whole chapter from Ruskin was used frequently by MacDiarmid. See, for example, "The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid" in S.E., p.25, where MacDiarmid uses Ruskin's theory to justify his own Communism.

For those who had developed a socialism built on the ideals of men like Ruskin and Morris, Nietzsche was to have a particular appeal. Indeed, it was Orage and N.A. who played the most significant role in the spreading of the Nietzschean gospel.[7] One commentary in N.A. stated that Nietzsche,

> ... knew and preached, as we modern socialists know and preach, that the majority of existing customs, religions, laws, etc., must be demolished before any new system could really have its beginning ("Nietzsche v Socialism", N.A., 3 June, 1909, p.127, quoted in Thatcher, p.223)

and this is characteristic of the response to Nietzsche's ideas in the pre-war period, although later his philosophy was to receive a more complex interpretation.

While Nietzsche's works were known in Britain in the 1890's and influenced, among others, Yeats, Shaw and Havelock Ellis, they did not become generally available until after 1907 when Orage with his revived N.A. mounted an intense campaign for the dissemination of Nietzsche's writings. Holbrook Jackson wrote that it was he who first introduced Orage to the philosophy of Nietzsche, and Orage's response was to go "over the top, and so did the group [the Leeds Arts Club]. We all developed supermania".[8] In addition to his book on theosophy referred to earlier, Orage published in 1906, Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age, followed in 1907 by, Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism. From the inception of N.A. in 1907 through to 1913, articles, reviews and letters, the majority of which were written by the major translators of Nietzsche in the period -- Oscar Levy, A.M. Ludovici, Holbrook Jackson and J.M. Kennedy -- proliferate in the pages of N.A.[9] Orage's intent was

[7] David S. Thatcher, Nietzsche in England, p.235. In his study of the influence of Nietzsche in Britain, Thatcher attributes Orage with having played the major part in the distribution and popularization of Nietzsche's views. He writes, "It is no exaggeration to say that with the advent of Orage's 'New Age' a new phase in the English reputation of Nietzsche begins".

[8] The New English Weekly, 15 Nov., 1934, p.10.

[9] For a list of some of the many items which appeared on Nietzsche see Thatcher, p. 302, Note 44. Thatcher also draws up a most useful table of dates of publications and translations.

to make Nietzsche's writings available to the general public for the first time, and, characteristically, he brought to this mission a messianic zeal which was to influence a number of his protéges.

Herbert Read and Edwin Muir in particular were to be totally seduced by Nietzsche's philosophy. Muir wrote that he read Nietzsche for "more than a year" and recalled that at the time the "idea of a transvaluation of all values intoxicated me with a feeling of false power", a reaction which he later came to see was a psychological compensation for his own deprived circumstances.[10] In retrospect, it is not difficult to see why Nietzsche would have held such a strong appeal for those of Muir's generation and social background, for to many readers of N.A. Nietzsche's doctrines must have seemed to offer a way of overcoming the limitations imposed on them by the inequalities of the class structure. To such aspiring artists, Nietzsche would have offered the necessary vision of themselves as precursors of a superior being, for Nietzsche had declared that it was the creative capacities of the individual which would eventually redeem civilization. Thus, "Become what you are", was the creed to be followed in rejecting old social ties. The task of the modern artist, as Nietzsche saw it, was to break with the old values and forms, and, irrespective of birth and circumstance, create the world anew. The attraction of such views was essentially contradictory, for while Nietzsche's ideas seemed to sanction social revolution, they also gave to the artist a picture of himself as part of a new aristocracy, a new artistic elect, which as a forerunner of the Superman would view itself as innately superior to the vulgar unindoctrinated masses.

During the First World War, Nietzsche's reputation in Britain suffered from the excesses of patriotism, but after the war there was a resurgence of interest in his ideas which has been attributed to the fact that a generation which had become familiar with Nietzsche's

[10]In following Orage's directions to study the work of one major writer, Muir chose Nietzsche, but he later vindicated his over-enthusiasm for the philosopher by stating that Nietzsche was a "last desperate foothold on my dying dreams of the future ... I could not face my life as it was and so I took refuge in the fantasy of the Superman" (An Autobiography, p.126).

works through N.A. and in the new translations,[11] was also the generation who had experienced trench warfare. To that group, Nietzsche's warning of the imminent collapse of civilization did not seem as eccentric as it had to many of their elders, for the nightmare of the spirit Nietzsche had given voice to had become for them an all too material anguish. Post-war articles on Nietzsche in N.A. hailed the philosopher's writings as prophetic. In addition, as his aphoristic style gained academic respectability and as his concept of a fundamental energy which informed the whole of life began to be increasingly associated with the ideas of Bergson's élan vital and Kierkegaard's philosophy, as well as Dostoevsky's novels, Nietzsche's reputation was not only restored but re-acclaimed.[12]

With the publication of the works of Jung and Freud, attention was drawn to the way in which these theorists (particularly Jung) had called on Nietzsche's interpretation of myth and use of symbol for their formulations of the nature of mind, and Nietzsche was given credit for being a great and courageous explorer of the unconscious. Janko Lavrin, one of N.A. regulars, and a friend of Orage and MacDiarmid, published a series of articles which were later compiled into a book, Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness (1922). This work was a companion piece to an earlier book on Ibsen and to one on Dostoevsky entitled, Dostoevsky and his Creation: A Psycho-critical Study (1920). A series of articles published by Lavrin in N.A. which never appeared in book form, "Vladimir Soloviev and the Religious Philosophy of Russia",[13] also belongs to this group, for all deal in related ways with the growth of consciousness and the complementary idea of cultural resurgence, and provide an example both of the topicality of such subjects and the way in which Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Soloviev were being compared.

[11] Thatcher, p.10.

[12] Thatcher, p.10.

[13] N.A., 15, 22, 29 Oct., 5, 12 Nov., 31 Dec., 1925, 7 Jan., 1926.

The sense of the interrelatedness of these three writers was certainly picked up by MacDiarmid and used by him as a spur to find ways of revitalizing his native culture. The concept of a new phase in the historical process about to make itself known, gave him the sense of purpose he required for the task, and it was only natural that he should look to Russia, the country where the "new order" was already in progress, and to the two writers with whom he was to find himself in intellectual and emotional sympathy -- Dostoevsky and Soloviev.

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Chapter Seven

Dostoevsky: "The Soul of Russia"

At the turn of the century Russia was still very much an unknown country to the rest of Europe, but curiosity about Slavic culture began to build as the works of the writers of Russia's golden age of literature became available in translation. Even so, the growth of this interest was a gradual movement, but after the translation of Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov in 1912 the response to Russian culture in Britain took on immense proportions and developed into a peculiar phenomenon of the time.

Prior to the emergence of this enthusiasm, the potential influence of Russian literature had been recognized by Matthew Arnold as early as 1887, when, in a review of Tolstoy, he wrote,

> ... it is not the English novel that has inherited the vogue lost by the French ... but that of a country new to literature ... the novel of Russia which now has the vogue and deserves to have it (Fortnightly Review, Dec., 1887).[1]

Following Arnold's commentary, the only recognizable influence of Russian literature on a British artist up until the time of Constance Garnett's translation, was that of Dostoevsky on Robert Louis Stevenson.

Stevenson's interest in Dostoevsky centred on that writer's representation of the duality of consciousness, no doubt because it was so much in sympathy with his own belief that "man is not truly one, but two".[2] Dostoevsky's preoccupation with the psychopathology of mind was to emerge in Stevenson's work directly after he read Crime and Punishment. In 1886, Stevenson wrote to John Addington Symonds,

> Raskolnikoff is easily the greatest book I have read in ten years ... I am glad you took to it. Many find it dull: Henry James couldn't finish it: all I can say is, it nearly finished me. It was like having an illness (Letters, ed. Sidney Colvin (London: Heinemann, 1926), II, p.323).[3]

[1] Quoted in Gilbert Phelps, The Russian Novel in English Fiction (London: Hutchinson, 1956), p.38.

[2] The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1886), p.108.

[3] Quoted in Phelps, p.170.

Subsequently, the work which has been described as a miniature Crime and Punishment, Markheim, appeared in 1885, followed in 1886 by The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in which Stevenson took a notorious Edinburgh character -- Deacon Brodie -- and grafted him to the spirit of Raskolnikoff. (Phelps, pp.165-7)

Following Stevenson's interest, there was little development in Russian literature in Britain until the appearance in translation of Merezhkovsky's essay, "Tolstoy as Man and Artist" (1902).[4] Dmitry Sergeyevich Merezhkovsky (1865-1941) was a leading spokesman of the 1890's Moscow movement which was to prove to be of great interest to N.A. and MacDiarmid. Diaghilev's periodical, Mir Iskustva (The World of Art) played a significant role in this movement, for it introduced into Russian culture a new sophistication and enrichment by refocusing attention on the uniqueness and excellence of the native Iconographic tradition, while at the same time bringing public attention to new movements in the world of modern art, particularly to the developments in the French Post-Impressionist school.[5]

This synthesis of the old and new was quickly adopted by the emerging generation of writers and artists as an aesthetic creed. For the writers, the greatest native literary influence was seen as residing in those authors who had given expression to the Slavophile view of Russian culture -- Dostoevsky and Soloviev -- while the greatest external influence came, not so much from the French Symbolistes, as from Nietzsche. Merezhkovsky's essay was first serialized in Mir Iskustva in 1901[6] and in that work he compares Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, ascribing to them antithetical status, with Tolstoy representing the Western view of life and Dostoevsky, the Slavophile. Such a representation was indicative of Merezhkovsky's own interest in

[4]First published in English in 1902 (London: Constable) and reprinted in Russian Literature and Modern English Fiction, ed. Donald Davie (Chicago: University Press, 1965), pp.75-98, which is the reference used here.

[5]Dmitry Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature, p.153.

[6]Mirsky, p.153.

Nietzsche, and, in particular in Nietzsche's exploration of Greek classical culture as the conflict of opposites, the argument of The Birth of Tragedy.

Merezhkovsky wrote a trilogy which was published under the general title of Christ and Anti-Christ,[7] the work listed in the Langholm Library catalogue. These works had as their theme classical and renaissance culture and their achievement was that for the first time Russian writers became aware of these traditions, a view summed up in the comment that because of Merezhkovsky's work, "Florence and Athens became something more than mere names to the Russian intellectual" (Mirsky, p.158). Following Diaghilev's example, Merezhkovsky, through his own periodical, Novy Put (The New Way), introduced readers to both native literary influences and to writers like Flaubert and Ibsen, and, as with Orage and N.A., actively encouraged the work of new writers, particularly those who were to give expression to the spirit of a modern literary Russia. (Mirsky, p.163)

Merezhkovsky's essay found a wide audience in Britain, and kept the interest in Russian culture alive until it was picked up and explored by N.A. Attention has already been drawn to the part played by Arnold Bennett in the translation and appreciation of major Russian writers and it was also suggested that this burgeoning interest was part of a more widespread movement referred to as a "renaissance" by certain N.A. writers. It was this attitude which prepared the way for the almost manic reception of Dostoevsky after 1912, but the extreme degree of the response has been associated with a collection of causes centring around the final rejection of nineteenth-century rationalism and the need for new social and spiritual directions. (Phelps, p.14) Consistent with this need, Dostoevsky seemed to present an entirely new

[7]As the title suggests, these works advocated a synthesis of the pagan cult of the flesh and the Christian cult of the spirit. Their individual titles were, Julian the Apostate, Leonardo da Vinci and Peter the Great.

understanding of spiritual and emotional life. His writings were seen as an expression of trends which had become apparent in Symbolist poetry and Post-Impressionist painting, and were to be associated, as Nietzsche's work was, with the philosophy of Bergson and Kierkegaard. (Phelps, p.14) Collectively, these trends were to converge and displace the old static concept of consciousness with a new emphasis on process, flux and vitalism. As Diaghilev and that cluster of great Russian artists arrived in London, they provided the tangible evidence that a new spiritual force which had its roots in the Slavic psyche had flowered. In 1916 when enthusiam for Russian culture was at its height, MacMillan published a work lavishly illustrated with colour plates entitled, The Soul of Russia, a title which indicates the nature of the public interest.[8]

That the response to Russian culture had its faddish and absurd side is supported by such satirizing of events as are found, for example, in Somerset Maugham's Ashenden, where the hero's activities in that period are related as follows,

> It was at the time when Europe discovered Russia. Everyone was reading the Russian novelists, the Russian dancers captivated the civilised world, and the Russian composers set shivering the sensibility of persons who were beginning to want a change from Wagner. Russian art seized upon Europe with the virulence of an epidemic of influenza. New phrases became the fashion, new colours, new emotions, and the high-brows described themselves without a moment's hesitation as members of the intelligentsia. Ashenden fell like the rest, changed the cushions of his sitting-room, hung an eikon on the wall, read Chekoff and went to the ballet ... all the literary folk in London ... gazed with humble reverence at pale-faced bearded giants who leaned against the wall like caryatids taking a day off; they were revolutionaries to a man and it was a miracle that they were not in the mines of Siberia. Women of letters tremulously put their lips to a glass of vodka. If you were lucky and greatly favoured you might shake hands there with Diaghileff, and now and again, like a peach-blossom wafted by the breeze, Pavlova herself hovered in and out....[9]

[8]Dorothy Brewster, East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), p.170.

[9]Ashenden or the British Agent (1928; rpt. London: Heinemann, 1961), p.273.

Self-indulgent as the interest in Russian culture often was, it nevertheless represented a new intellectual focus in which it was seen that "Russia was to the young intellectual of the day what Italy had been to the Victorians..." (Rebecca West, New Republic, 9 Jan., 1915, quoted in Brewster, p.179). However, there was a more practical reason for the sudden burst of translations which appeared, for in that period international copyright did not extend to Russia, so economically Russian writers represented a financial boom for English publishers. (Brewster, p.173)

Following the Russian Revolution interest in Dostoevsky and in Russian writing generally, was to wax and wane, but Spengler brought the subject back into the limelight again through the application of Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian antithesis to the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Significantly, MacDiarmid drew attention to Spengler's comparison in "A Theory of Scots Letters", by quoting that writer directly,

> ' ... beginning and end meet here, Dostoevsky is a saint, Tolstoy is merely a revolutionary. ... The Christianity of Tolstoy is a misunderstanding. He spoke of Christ and he meant Marx. The next thousand years belong to the Christianity of Dostoevsky' (S.C. March, 1923, p.214).

This opposition of the two writers was taken by Spengler directly from Merezhkovsky's essay, "Tolstoy as Man and Artist", the opening passage of which reads,

> If in the literature of all ages and nations we wished to find the artist most contrary to Tolstoi we should have to point to Dostoievski. I say contrary, but not remote, not alien, for often they come into contact, like extremes that meet (in Russian Literature and Modern English Fiction, p.75).

In pursuing his comparison, Merezhkovsky makes the point that while Dostoevsky's style is often cumbersome, "written always in one and the same hasty, sometimes clearly neglected language, is now wearisomely drawn out and involved, heaped with details; now too concise and compact", nevertheless, his heroes are of tragic

stature. (p.75) Tolstoy's heroes on the other hand, are "victims", for in his novels "human individuality ... is swallowed up in the elements" (p.75). This difference Merezhkovsky suggests, lies in the fact that Tolstoy's novels deal with the external, his works are a history of his heroes' birth, life and death, while Dostoevsky's works do the opposite, they ignore the external for the most part and recount instead the inner life of the characters. Accordingly, in " ... the predominance of heroic struggle the principal works of Dostoevsky are in reality not novels nor epics, but tragedies" (p.76).

The heroes of Dostoevsky, Merezhkovsky claims, have their equal only in Greek tragedy,

> At times in Greek tragedy, just before the catastrophe, there suddenly sounds in our ears an unexpectedly joyous chant of the chorus in praise of Dionysos, god of wine and blood, of mirth and terror. And in this chant the whole tragedy that is in progress and almost completed, all the fateful and mysterious that there is in human life, is presented to us as the careless sport of the spectator god. This mirth in terror, this tragical play, is like the play of the rainbow kindling in the foam of some cataract above a gulf.
>
> Dostoievski is nearest of all to us, to the most inward and deeply-seated principles of Greek tragedy. We find him depicting catastrophes with something of this terrible gaiety of the chorus (p.81).

Here, the analogy between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche which Merezhkovsky goes on to develop emerges clearly. Just as Nietzsche had claimed that the Dionysian spirit in Greek tragic chorus was the authentic expression of the vitalising human spirit, "the eternal core of things", so Dostoevsky's "catastrophes" have the same "terrible gaiety". Merezhkovsky makes the point that both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky intuitively recognized life as being a process of spiritual struggle, and both saw that struggle as a means to a higher end. To Nietzsche, pain was the necessary antecedent of a higher type of consciousness; to Dostoevsky, suffering, often portrayed through images of physical illness such as the Prince's epilepsy in The

Idiot, was always "the source of some higher life", was the "birth-pang" of a new humanity. (p.88)

Working towards his conclusion, Merezhkovsky contrasts the religious attitudes of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. All of the Russian's heroes are "God-tortured", that is, the constant and central dilemma of Dostoevsky's greatest characters -- Ivan Karamazov, for example -- is whether to deny or affirm the existence of God. Nietzsche too was obsessed with this problem, but his response was to deny the existence of God, seeing the death of God as the necessary precondition for the emergence of the Superman. Both men were visionaries, but there is no doubt as to who it is Merezhkovsky regards as the greater of the two. Dostoevsky, like Nietzsche, believed in the survival of a human spiritual integrity, but he felt that a communal regeneration of that spirit would come, not from killing God, but from the fragments of the old religion, from "the religion of Christ the God-man" will emerge the new "Man-God", declares Kirillov in The Possessed. (p.91)

In portraying the inner struggle of man, Dostoevsky, Merezhkovsky explains, not only prepared the way for a new understanding of man and his world, but created a new synthesis of knowledge. Dostoevsky's accuracy of observation is combined with "the instincts of genius" in a way which makes his work comparable with the poems of Goethe and the drawings of Da Vinci. (p.84). Upon accurate and detailed observation, the method of science, Dostoevsky had built his work, and had combined that accuracy with the intensity of great art. In this fusion of art and science, Dostoevsky's intent had been to lead the mind out of fear and misunderstanding by raising the perception of consciousness to a new plane. While antithesis defined the movement of mind in Dostoevsky's works, he also recognized the need to transcend the dichotomy of inner perception and outer

reality by creating from within, a spiritual revolution. Social change, to Dostoevsky, states Merezhkovsky, was meaningless unless it was preceded by a shift in the form of consciousness.

It is on his understanding of Dostoevsky as a spiritual revolutionary that Merezhkovsky, in the high rhetoric of his concluding passage, can signal that it is Russia's destiny to fulfil the spirit of Dostoevsky and "lead the universal civilization of the future" (p.84). He writes,

> An almost unbearable burden of responsibility is thus laid on our generation. Perhaps the destinies of the world never hung so finely in the balance before ... The spirit of man is faintly conscious that the beginning of the end is at hand ...
>
> Among the common people, far down out of hearing there are those who are awakening as we. Who will be the first to arise and say that he is awake? Who has overcome the fine delusion of our day, which confounds in each of us, in minds and life, the withering of the seed with its revival, the birth-pang with the death-pang, the sickness of Regeneration with the sickness of Degeneration, the true 'symbolism' with 'decadence'? Action is first needed; and only when we have action can we speak. Meanwhile here is an end of our open course, our words, our contemplation; and a beginning of our secrecy, our silence, and our action (pp.97-8).

The whole purpose of Merezhkovsky's comparison between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky was to stress that Russia should abandon the kind of move towards Westernization Tolstoy had been advocating and instead reassert her Slav origins in the spirit of Dostoevsky.

It was according to the above interpretation that Spengler dismissed Tolstoy's concern with the outer life, his preoccupation, like that of Marx, with the need to change the material and economic basis of men's lives, as inferior to Dostoevsky's ennobling vision. Spengler saw the rise of Russia as a nation as a new cycle in history and believed that the revolution it would effect would be to the present day what Christianity had been two

thousand years before. "The next thousand years", wrote Spengler, "belong to the Christianity of Dostoevsky".[10]

The interpretation of Dostoevsky as the spirit of Russia and the future which Spengler used to support his theory of history, proved to be sympathetic to MacDiarmid's own view in a number of ways. The theory affirmed and explained the need and nature of revolution as a mass movement which had its roots in the psychology of the populace; it suggested a relationship between art and life which stressed the role of art as the liberator of consciousness and therefore sanctioned the role of artist as revolutionary in the same way that Nietzsche had done; lastly, Dostoevsky's passion for exploring the darker side of the mind had revealed a part of life which MacDiarmid saw was the province of the vernacular.

[10] The Decline of the West, trans. C.F. Atkinson (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926) II, p.194. Spengler went as far as to compare pre-revolutionary Russia with the early days of Christianity, "Those young Russians of the days before 1914 - dirty, pale, exalted, moping in corners, ever absorbed in metaphysics seeing all things with an eye of faith even when the ostensible topic is the franchise, chemistry or women's education - are the Jews and early Christians of the Hellenic cities, whom the Romans regarded with a mixture of surly amusement and secret fear...." According to Spengler it was this group which brought to Moscow "the soul of the countryside" which was the complete antithesis of the "Westernized spirit of the upper classes". "Between the two worlds", Spengler claimed, "there was no reciprocal comprehension, no communication, no charity. To understand the two spokesmen and victims of the pseudomorphosis it is enough that Dostoevsky is the peasant, and Tolstoy the man of Western society. The one could never in his soul get away from the land; the other, in spite of his desperate efforts, could never get near it".

According to MacDiarmid, the view of life expressed by Dostoevsky, in Notes from the Underground, life seen as an "'incessant process of attaining'", was one which was directly identifiable with the Scottish spirit, for, wrote MacDiarmid, "It is of first rate significance ... that what really does most profoundly appeal to us is not pleasure but pain" (S.C., Feb., 1923, p.184). Such cultural similarities were, MacDiarmid claimed, an illustration of "the mystical relation of Scotland and Russia", for what the two nations shared was the tragic view of life. (p.184) The affinities between the two countries were primarily psychological, he explained, and were to be located in the similarities between Dostoevsky's work and the vernacular. "The Scottish vernacular", wrote MacDiarmid,

> ... is the only language in Western Europe instinct with those uncanny spiritual and pathological perceptions alike which constitute the uniqueness of Dostoevsky's work, and word after word of Doric establishes a blood-bond in a fashion at once infinitely more thrilling and vital and less explicable than those deliberately sought after by writers such as D.H. Lawrence in the medium of English.... The vernacular is a vast unutilised mass of lapsed observations made by minds whose attitudes to experience and whose speculative and imaginative tendencies were quite different from any possible to Englishmen and Anglicized Scots today. It is an inchoate Marcel Proust - a Dostoevskian debris of ideas... (S.C., March, 1923, p.210).

The "pathological perceptions" seen in Dostoevsky's fiction and Scots vernacular alike, represented what had been virtually an unexplored channel of experience, and, MacDiarmid pointed out, just as Dostoevsky's recognition of the common spirit of man in his idea of consciousness as being both something individual and shared was the prelude to an extension of individual liberty, so too, the vernacular was a great leveller, bringing as it did, "all sorts and conditions of men to a greatest common measure of sheer humanity" (p.211). The vernacular was "a powerful preservative of the true spirit of democracy" (p.211). Burns, claimed MacDiarmid,

in "A Man's a Man for a' That" had "brilliantly forecasted the spirit of the French Revolution" and similarly, "the whole unrealized genius of the Scots vernacular has brilliantly forecasted - potentially if not actually - tendencies which are only now emerging in European life and literature, and which must unquestionably have a very important bearing upon the future of human culture and civilization" (p.212).

MacDiarmid emphasized that the way had been cleared for the emergence of a new world spirit and the role the vernacular could play in the development of this new freedom would be to liberate a regenerating energy. The model for this new order was, once again, to come from Russia, specifically for MacDiarmid from the religious philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev.

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Chapter Eight

Soloviev: The Russo-Scottish Parallelism

The philosophy and criticism of Vladimir Sergeyvich Soloviev (1853-1900), although little known in the West, dominates the development of modern Russian literature. In the late nineteenth century, as will have become evident from the foregoing discussion, there existed two identifiable streams of thought in Russia -- the "Western" and the "Slavophile". Advocates of the former supported the complete Westernization of Russia, seeing it as important that she integrate herself with the rest of Europe as quickly as possible. The Slavophiles on the other hand, argued that Russia should follow her own destiny and develop intellectually from her old cultural origins while at the same time retaining her religious distinctiveness in the Orthodox church.[1] A religious, philosophical, cultural, and latterly a political movement, the Slavophiles emerged as a viable alternative to Tolstoism, and indeed, the spirit of the movement aligned itself with Dostoevsky's works, which is why both Merezhkovsky and Spengler see these two figures as representing antithetical cultural streams.

Soloviev was the central figure of the Slavophile movement and was readily identifiable because he was a prolific and popular writer of philosophy and literary criticism. His work was published mainly in periodicals which, again the parallel is with N.A., acted as both a transmitter of social, political and cultural ideas and a showplace for new writers.[2] As Soloviev's literary criticism evolved, so did a new range of periodicals which were to become the tools with which Diaghilev and Merezhkovsky in turn, exerted their considerable talents on a younger generation, until what emerged

[1] Count Peter Kropotkin, Russian Literature (London: Duckworth, 1905), pp. 285-6.

[2] Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature, p.72.

was an "intelligentsia" bound together with ideals informed still by the tenets of Christianity.

In his "Theory of Scots Letters", MacDiarmid refers specifically to the kind of literary journalism which influenced this Russian movement, and states that while much of the criticism was "didactic and partisan", it nevertheless succeeded in "the spreading of modern and free opinions ... and the establishment of new ideals" which, in time, developed into a recognizable "moral and socio-political power" (S.C., April, 1923, p.240). Scotland, MacDiarmid pointed out, had no equivalent to that kind of journalism, yet, it was exactly the kind of focus for ideas that the country desperately needed. A literary criticism which would develop into a popular way of expressing views on all the important issues of the day was what had to be aimed for, a criticism which would produce "a succession of literary critics ... culminating in an equivalent to the moral philosopher and theologian Soloviev" (p.240).

The ideas of Soloviev, MacDiarmid continued, had found a recent exponent and champion in Scotland in James Young Simpson (1873-1934), Professor of Natural Science at Edinburgh's theological college, New College, who in an article (which MacDiarmid quotes) had written that Soloviev was "'one of the most interesting phenomena of modern Russia and its mental fermentation - a fearless, fiery proclaimer of the truth, without thought for himself, unselfish, serving only the idea, lastly a contrast to all. His great merit is in times of absolute positivism, nay, indifference to all theory and to metaphysics, to have drawn attention to the 'eternal' questions'" (p.240).[3] Reiterating Simpson's claims for Soloviev, MacDiarmid argues that Soloviev had created in Russia the conditions necessary for a great spiritual change because he had had the courage to offer the people "a poetic vision of life" (p.240).

[3]This piece is in fact a quotation from A. Bruckner, A Literary History of Russia, trans. H. Havelock (London: Fisher and Unwin, 1908), pp.329-30.

MacDiarmid felt that the lack of a unifying vision was the reason why most people felt their lives to be completely directionless. What had gone wrong, MacDiarmid claimed, was that in a time of great social upheaval such as was taking place in the West, too many had given way to nihilism and despair. But, argued MacDiarmid, this was a false view of things, for it was not necessary to see present change as indicative of future chaos. Others had recognized change as something to be welcomed. Orage, for example, wrote MacDiarmid, had interpreted the present situation as a "forward movement in the direction of adaptation" which would lead ultimately to a "Renaissance" or "New Coming" (S.C., June, 1923, p.302). This new order, Orage had claimed, would be one in which, MacDiarmid pointed out, the divisions between science and mysticism would be healed, the scientific and the mystical/religious views of men would synthesize into a new whole. The function of the poet in an age of social disorder was therefore, wrote MacDiarmid, to attempt to effect this synthesis between science and religion, for,

> Poetry will regain its position again only in so far as it achieves the synthesis for which we seek - and towards which Science, in so far as it is also Vision, is consciously bending its utmost energies today. The sort of Science which will ultimately achieve this synthesis, however, will be indistinguishable from Poetry. Indeed it may be that Science may be the father Poetry needs for the Super-Sense that is to be ... the best way in which a young poet today can approach his task is by making a philosophical investigation into some of the fundamental conceptions of science and philosophy, with special reference to the ideas of relativists. Only so can he appreciate clearly and effectively that a reality which at least in some measure has the qualities of four-dimensionality is already not unknowable to us - and that the paramount function of poetry must be to increase and eventually to complete our knowledge of it (pp.301-2).

Poetry will offer direction again, claimed MacDiarmid, when it expands knowledge about the universe in a way which is consistent with and attuned to the "vision" of a science which sees as its end, not only the extension of understanding about the material world, but the synthesis of that knowledge into a whole developed view of life. The importance of the "ideas of the relativists" in such a scheme was that they had opened up an understanding of the universe which could never have evolved from the evidence of the senses alone, and they were therefore an imaginative leap ahead of the pragmatists and the positivists. MacDiarmid would have it that the new physics was the product of the synthesis of the intuitive imagination and the discipline of science.

MacDiarmid's response to Soloviev's vision rested upon his understanding of the philosopher as one who had integrated various levels of knowledge into one system, for Soloviev had attempted to use new scientific understanding to reinterpret Christian doctrine. It was this aspect of the Russian philosopher's work which had also attracted James Young Simpson, who had travelled extensively in Russia and whose work, Side-lights on Siberia, is yet another of those works which appears in the Langholm Library catalogue. Probably influenced by Soloviev's ideas, Simpson in Man and the Attainment of Immortality (1922) put forward the thesis that biological evolution did not necessarily contradict the Christian understanding of immortality. MacDiarmid reviewed this work in his essay "A Russo-Scottish Parallelism" (1923), in which he compares Soloviev and Simpson in order to once again demonstrate the nature of the affinities between the two countries.[4]

MacDiarmid begins his essay by explaining that Simpson "rejects the idea that man is inherently an immortal soul" and proposes in

[4]The essay first appeared in The Glasgow Herald, 17 March, 1923, p.6. It is reprinted in S.E., pps.38-43, which is the reference used here.

place of such a doctrine that with the emergence of man in the chain of evolution a new spiritual form was created and was one which offered a "'moral linkage'" with God. (p.39) Simpson sees man's consciousness as the evolutionary step which made a new spiritual freedom possible, for freedom, he believes, is realized in increasing ways when man acts, not as a "'passive participant'" in the universe, but as an active being who exercises his will in the pursuit of unity and harmony. (p.42) According to Simpson, "'Man becomes perfect when his freedom and God's freedom are harmonized'", something which can only result from "'perfect mutual experience'" (p.42). Such mutual interchange establishes a unity which is "'free from all limitations'" and is therefore of the essence of "'Eternal Life'" (p.42).

This idea, conceived of as the active unity between man and God, affirmed the Christian view in the modern world, for Simpson believed that "'in an evolutionary process, once it is proved to be a progressive process, there is more reason to consider everything unique; there is no duplication or repetition'" (p.42). Simpson's argument is directed against what he sees as the mechanistic interpretation of Darwinian biology and he wants to assert that the evolutionary process ensures, not uniformity, but progressive individuality. The proof of such a conception, lies for Simpson in the emergence within evolution of the "'perfect manhood of Jesus Christ'", for in Christ, "'the creative spirit of God came to full and perfect expression as a revealing, energizing, and saving power'" (p.42). In the emergence of the Divine made human in the body of Christ, the vitalizing force of evolution, Simpson claimed, realized a new freedom based on love and harmony. The creative principle informing the universe was therefore a progressive and benevolent one, and an understanding of its movement through scientific investigation only confirmed that view for Simpson. Science and Christianity

were not therefore, to Simpson's mind, antithetical, but confirmatory principles.

MacDiarmid claims in his essay that the significance of Simpson's concept of a "'conscious and reciprocal union'" between man and God, is that it is an example of the way in which "every new idea of world moment manifests itself sporadically in contemporary consciousness" (p.38). The ideas of the Scottish professor of Natural Science and those of the Russian religious mystic were not only evidence of a new synthesis between science and religion, but were once again an example of the affinities between the two countries, it was "A Russo-Scottish Parallelism".

Soloviev's ideas were, however, a great deal more complex than Simpson's, and considerably more influential in his native country. Soloviev was the son of a noted Russian historian of aristocratic background and he grew up in the privileged and intellectual environment of Moscow University.[5] Not unexpectedly, his earliest interest was in history, particularly in Hegel's theory of historical process.[6] Described as a "Russian Newman",[7] Soloviev seems to have been an extraordinarily charismatic character whose lectures attracted not only the younger writers, but the established literary greats -- Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Indeed, so great was the impression he made on the latter writer, he is reputed to be the model for Alyosha in The Brothers Karamazov.[8]

[5]Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature: 1881-1925, p.72.

[6]V.V. Zenkovsky, A History of Russian Philosophy, trans. G.L. Kline (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), II, p.483.

[7]Monsr. Michel d'Herbigny, Vladimir Soloviev: A Russian Newman: 1853-1900, trans. A.M. Buchanan (London: 1918). This is a rather partisan view of Soloviev which claims that he converted to Catholicism on his death-bed. However, the comparison with Newman is apt in terms of the influence Soloviev exerted on the intellectuals of his day in Russia.

[8]Janko Lavrin, Dostoevsky: A Study (London: Methuen, 1943), p. 143.

As far as Soloviev's standing as a philosopher is concerned, opinion is distinctly divided. On the one hand he is seen as contributing nothing original to Western philosophical thought, but is considered more of a Theosophist, a prophet and mystic. (Mirsky, p.72) On the other, he is regarded as the most influential philosopher of his time and the first to offer a comprehensive theory in the history of Russian thought. (Zenkovsky, p.474) Where opinion is reconciled is in the enormous influence Soloviev is seen to have exerted in his day and in his ability to integrate various types and levels of knowledge into a unified system.

In his earliest work, Soloviev, as Simpson had noted, attacked the positivism which he felt was responsible for moral and intellectual decay in the West. All systems which were exclusively abstract were to Soloviev something to be mistrusted and were to be seen as belonging to the past. As an alternative and corrective to positivism Soloviev studied Eastern philosophy and hermeticism and was to advocate a synthesis of the Western empirical tradition and the mystical oriental tradition. Such a move, Soloviev felt, was a means of integrating the scientific and the religious/mystical into one system in which each would compensate for the other and, in time, evolve a single world view.

In his more developed theories, presented in the public lectures which Soloviev gave in Moscow in the 1880's, he put forward the idea that was to be picked up later by Simpson, that an "organic" civilization could only emerge if man actively participated in the process of "interaction between God and man - a divine human process" (Lectures on Godmanhood, quoted in Zenkovsky, p.474). Addressing the problem of duality, Soloviev claimed that the material world is "only a different and improper interrelation of the very same elements which constitute the being of the divine world" (p.498). Since "no being can have the ground of its existence outside of God", Soloviev

argued, it must follow that "nature, in contradistinction to Deity, can only be another arrangement or permutation of ... elements which have their substantial being in the divine world" (p.498). Creation was therefore, to Soloviev, no simple rearrangement of existing and identifiable elements, but, "the coming into being of something new" (p.499). What took place was a "gradual spiritualization of man through an inner assimilation and development of the divine principle", so that man was in reality "the natural mediator between God and material being" (p.500). The way in which man brought more and more of the material, phenomenal world into being constituted for Soloviev the historical process.

Formulated from Hegelian dialectic and supplemented by German Romanticism, Soloviev's philosophy presupposed that the Divine needs an "ideal reality", an "other" in which it can manifest itself. In accordance with the Hegelian world view, Soloviev saw the universe as an animate whole in which there were no divisions. He accepted the "inseparable connection" of the universe, stating "there is no boundary line dividing it into separate, mutually connected realms of being" (Sochineniya VII, quoted in Zenkovsky, p.509).

The emergence of consciousness in man, claimed Soloviev, was evidence of the way in which the spiritual or divine realizes itself through its antithesis -- matter. Matter, in turn, was the only way the divine had of making its essence concrete. Accordingly the universe was one interacting whole in which "All human elements form an integral organism, which is at the same time both universal and individual - a pan-human organism" which"contains and connects with all living entities or souls" to form the "world soul" (Lectures on Godmanhood, quoted in Zenkovsky, p. 513).

In accord with his mistrust of abstractions, Soloviev was to give to his explanation of the duality of mind and matter as a "world soul" an actual identity -- Sophia. In the hermetic and

gnostic traditions Sophia is the traditional symbol of Wisdom, but Sophia was also a potent and emotional emblem of the Russian soul and for the Slavophile movement which Soloviev led, the image of Sophia was a way of enshrining their collective aspirations and ideals.

The mystical aspects of Soloviev's character emerge most distinctly in his records of his visionary experiences. In 1875 Soloviev went to London to study hermeticism and read in the British Museum. There, he had the first of his three visions of Sophia. These visions were the subject of his poem, "The Three Meetings", part of which reads as follows,

> ... All that was, and is, and ever shall be
> My steadfast gaze embraced it all in one.
> The seas and rivers sparkle blue beneath me,
> And distant woods, and mountains clad in snow.
> I saw it all, and all was one fair image
> Of woman's beauty, holding all as one.
> The boundless was within its form enclosed -
> Before me and in me is you alone.[9]

The transcendental vision expressed here celebrates the unity of creation, and was to become a recurrent theme among the poets of this movement. The same theme is found in MacDiarmid's early work, particularly in the work dedicated to "George Ogilvie", where the informing spirit of creation is seen as a sacred light,

> .....
> Like a white light deeper in God's heart
> This light would shine.
> Pondering the imponderable,
> Revealing ever clearlier
> Patterns of endless revels,
> Each gesture freed,
> Each shining shadow of difference,
> Each subtle phase evolved
> In the magnificent and numberless
> Revelations of ecstasy
> Succeeding and excelling inexhaustibly,
> - A white light like silence
> Accentuating the great songs!
> - A shining silence wherein God
> Might see as in a mirror
> The miracles He must next achieve! ... (C.P. I, p.7)

[9]There are no anthologies of Soloviev's poetry available in English. The above is quoted in Soloviev's Plato, trans. Richard Gill and intro. by Janko Lavrin (London: Nott, 1935), p.17.

Ah, Light,
That is God's inmost wish,
His knowledge of Himself,
Flame of creative judgement,
God's interrogation of infinity ... (C.P. I, p.7)

The poem ends with the lines, "O Thou,/Who art the wisdom of the God/ Whose ecstasies we are!", and it is clear that "Light" is specifically associated with Sophia. In "A Russo-Scottish Parallelism", MacDiarmid makes this connection explicit. The "world-soul", MacDiarmid explains, has a double character which allows it to assert itself outside of God -- a choice which leads to chaos and anarchy -- or, it can "surrender itself to God", creating through Sophia, "perfect unity and harmony" (S.E., p.41). In its earliest stages of evolution, the "world-soul" was "broken into fragments and pulverized into an innumerable multitude of atoms" (S.E., p.41). In time, from this chaos of matter, ether was produced. This new form of matter was then used by the "logos to create ... the dynamical unity expressed by light" (S.E., p.41). Light, in turn, was then absorbed by the earth which "brings forth the creatures that have life - plants, animals, men. The new organic unity is objectively manifested by plants in the very form of their existence; it is subjectively felt by animals; it is conceptually understood by man" (S.E., p.41). This process is a continual one in which the "sensitive and imaginative soul of the physical world" increasingly becomes "the rational soul of man" (S.E., p.41). It is in this interchange that the "world-soul" and Sophia merge,

> The essential unity of all that is becomes now for the first time recognized by the world-soul through the reason and conscience of man. The Divine Wisdom finds at last the conscious subject that can enter into conscious and reciprocal union with her and raise up to her the whole of the material world (S.E., p.41).

Soloviev's concept of light as being contained in ether, is derived from late nineteenth-century theories of ether as fundamental matter, the force from which electricity, and subsequently, all forms of life derived. While MacDiarmid employs this understanding, this theory was, of course replaced by

physics, but it was in its day an acceptable scientific theory and one to which this discussion will return in relation to MacDiarmid's understanding of the poetry of John Davidson and his concept of materialism.

In Soloviev's scheme Sophia is also associated with Christ, Christ being the most perfect realization of spirit and matter in the evolutionary chain and a presence which attested to the new interaction between human and Divine. Christianity was therefore, to Soloviev, something contained within the historical process, for even the Dionysian cult with its rituals of the "hanging god", the god sacrificed on the tree of life and death, was the natural predecessor of the Crucifixion. The informing ideal of love which had been introduced by Christ's death was, to Soloviev, part of the ultimate task of history, the next phase of which would be to release ever more of the unifying power of love. Love was produced, Soloviev wrote, by a form of "syzygy" which "liberates bodily and spiritual currents which gradually come to dominate the material environment, spiritualizing it and embodying in it specific forms of 'total unity'" (The Meaning of Love, quoted in Zenkovsky, p.516). Historical development, to Soloviev, had always been progressive, a process which constantly moved towards cosmic unity. Nevertheless, he described historical process as "a long and painful parturition" in which suffering played the central part of the move from chaos to cosmos. (quoted in Zenkovsky, p.508)

Soloviev's philosophy as a whole represents an attempt to find a way out of the impasse of nineteenth-century rationalism, and while there is much in it which seems obscure and inconsistent, its importance lay in its ability to restore faith and purpose to existence. It was certainly this aspect of Soloviev's thinking

which appealed so strongly to his contemporaries, for what he offered was a way of thinking and living which neither repressed the creative capacities of individuals through an excess of dogma, nor robbed mankind of significance in a material world which science seemed to be increasingly demonstrating as being indifferent to human existence.[10]

Soloviev's concern to bring the material and spiritual spheres closer together by offering a unified vision of life which simultaneously drew on traditional religious concepts and distinctive cultural interests offered MacDiarmid a new and positive course, to be followed and developed in terms of his own national identity. The regenerative vision which MacDiarmid was to fashion found its perfect outlet in his long lyric work, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.

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[10] Zenkovsky, pp.780-9. As he does throughout his work, Zenkovsky emphasizes that Soloviev's influence marked a completely new development in Russian literature, and equates Soloviev's assertion of faith as a form of knowledge in itself with the writings of Kierkegaard and Existential philosophy.

Chapter Nine

'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'

In his first two collections MacDiarmid showed his facility in and mastery of the short lyric, as well as, in his longer poems, a propensity to write sustained philosophical verse. In his third poetical work MacDiarmid created a masterpiece. A Drunk Man is a lyric sequence of over two thousand lines which is orchestrated to encompass poetic and intellectual heights, yet is firmly rooted in the local through the use of the national emblem of Scotland -- the thistle -- as a protean and unifying symbol, and through the colloquial speech of a character who embodies the whole idea of Dionysian resurgence -- the Drunk Man of the piece.

The poem is a dramatic monologue in which a drunk man on his way home from an evening of carousing with his cronies, slips into a ditch where he falls asleep and, as in a mediaeval dream allegory, his thoughts are released to explore what might be fantasy or reality. Speaking completely in character as a drunk and as a Scot, the man through shifts in moods and quick changes and leaps in thought, explores his own psyche, searching simultaneously for the roots of his own and his nation's soul. The end result is a long poem of incredible variation which presents a surface of chaos and a deeper stratum of ordered movement.

MacDiarmid began work on A Drunk Man before his early lyrics appeared in print and the whole project was accompanied by his commentary on the work published at various stages of completion in local newspapers. One important description of the poem stated that it would be

> ... split into several sections, but the forms within the sections range from ballad measure to vers libre. The matter includes satire, amphigouri, lyrics, parodies of Mr. T.S. Eliot and other poets, and translations from the Russian, French and German. The whole poem is in braid Scots, except a few quotations which are

> in the nature of a skit on Mr. Eliot's 'Sweeney' poems, and it has been expressly designed to show that braid Scots can be effectively applied to all manner of subjects and measures (The Glasgow Herald, 17 Dec., 1925).

In another release, MacDiarmid pointed out that the work would be

> ... a complete poem ... deriving its unity from its pre-occupation with the distinctive elements in Scottish psychology which depend for their effective expression upon the hitherto unrealized potentialities of Braid Scots... (The Glasgow Herald, 13 Feb., 1926).

The above remain accurate descriptions of the poem and they emphasize MacDiarmid's concern to present the work as one complete movement.

MacDiarmid put his all into this work, for as he confided to Ogilvie,

> It will either make or finish me so far as Braid Scots work, and Messrs. Blackwood's are concerned. I dare not let them down with a work of such magnitude. As it now stands it'll be/ six times as big/ as 'Sangschaw' - some risk for any publisher these days. I've let myself go in it for all I'm worth. My friend Scott (the composer) and I afterwards went over the whole thing with a small tooth comb. But we both felt that the section I've been rewriting - which comes/ midway in the book and should represent the high water mark, the peaks of highest intensity could be improved by being recast and projected onto a different altitude of poetry altogether - made, instead of a succession of merely verbal and pictorial verses, into a series of metaphysical pictures with a definite progression, a cumulative effect - and that is what I've been busy with. It's infernally intractable material: but I've spared no pains and put my uttermost ounce into the business. I'm out to make or break in this matter. There are poems in the book (which is really one whole although many parts are detachable) of extra-ordinary power, I know - longer and far more powerful and unique in kind than anything in 'Sangschaw' or 'Penny Wheep'; but that's not what I'm after. It's the thing as a whole that I'm mainly concerned with, and if, as such, it does not take its place as a masterpiece - sui generis - one of the biggest things in the range of Scottish literature, I shall have failed... (6th August, 1926).

It is obvious from the above that MacDiarmid had a complete commitment to make this work the justification of the faith he had put into the idea of a Scots revival and his understanding of the seriousness of what it was he was attempting was of prime importance to him. Above all things he wanted to create a great work in the vernacular -- and he did not fail.

The creation of a dramatic character through whom he could express the complexities of his thought and feeling was a stylistic triumph for MacDiarmid, for by using the Drunk Man and his muddled, but not incoherent impressions, he was able to address his audience in familiar and direct terms, providing light relief while at the same time exploring metaphysical questions.[1] The footnotes to the version of "Gairmscoile" printed in S.C., suggest that MacDiarmid had originally planned a twelve-part structure for a long work,[2] but he abandoned the formal restraints of epic in favour of a more contrapuntal effect aided no doubt by the suggestions of his friend F.G. Scott, who helped to order the poem in its final form. What

[1]The idea of using a character talking in the vernacular may have been suggested to MacDiarmid by the critical theories of Carl Spitteler. MacDiarmid wrote to H.J.C. Grierson outlining his programme for the Scottish vernacular revival and stated that part of his intention was "to align my work with what I regard as the most significant tendencies emerging in welt-literatur - (e.g. in thinking of the Ballad form I have been influenced by Carl Spitteler's theories, and I may follow him with regard to the epic too)..." (12 May, 1925). Spitteler's theory of the ballad was that the form was "indirect lyric; lyric with a mask before its face". As to epic, Spitteler claimed that "direct address" was a device by which narrative was heightened and rendered more convincing. "The illusion of a character", he wrote, "who, in direct address, uses my language and thinks my logic, is stronger than the illusion of a character represented, in indirect address, merely by action or by a rough summary of his words. In Homer the preponderance of the direct address is so overwhelming that the action often seems merely an introduction or an appendix to the speeches" (Laughing Truths, trans. J.F. Muirhead, (London: Putnam, 1927)), p.219.

[2]Originally entitled "Braid Scots: An Inventory and Appraisement" and in a slightly altered form, "Gairmscoile" appeared in S.C., Nov./Dec., 1923. The footnotes which accompanied the poem indicated that in addition to the three sections presented, there would follow, "IV The Voice of Scotland; V Invocation to the old Makars; VI Scotland as Mystical Bride; VII Braid Scots and the Sense of Smell; VIII Braid Scots, Colour and Sound; IX Address to the World-Poets of To-day; X Edinburgh; XI Glasgow; XII Sunrise over Scotland and Epilogue."

gives the poem its characteristic liveliness is its extraordinary metrical variety, for over fifty metrical patterns have been identified in this work.[3] Ranging in length from dimeter to hexameter, the lines and individual lyrics of the work follow no predictable scheme. Individual lyrics vary greatly in length, rhyme and in the organization of stanzas, but metrical continuity is achieved by effects which MacDiarmid had shown mastery of in his early lyrics and which were derived primarily from the ballad. Simple repetition both of individual lines and couplets, and complete recurring metrical patterns, combined with echoing and parallelism, give the sound of the work a constant forward-backward movement, rather than a linear progression, an effect which is eminently suited to the drunken perceptions which are the subject of the poem and for the complex shifting pattern of images, which, through their flux connect the meaning of the poem.

The images are the means by which the action of the poem is realized, and these constantly merge and separate without warning as the Drunk Man confuses what he thinks he sees with the effects of the whisky. Such interchange contributes to the work's sense of movement, for as in the earlier poems, what is presented is a universe in which the edges of all objects are blurred to show a connectedness in all things and a material world informed by a process which links it directly with the infinite and eternal.

Again, as with the earlier poems, several of the lyrics are adaptations of translated works, with two important pieces being taken from the work of the Russian symbolist poet, Alexander Blok (1880-1921). Two symbolist movements have been identified in modern Russian poetry.[4] The first is seen as the Russian equivalent of the 1890's Decadent movement and of which Merezhkovsky was the chief representative. The second symbolist movement, which took place

[3]Stephen Mulrine, "The Prosody of Hugh MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'" in Akros, August 1977, pp.51-62.

[4]Renato Poggioli, "A Correspondence from Opposite Corners" in The Phoenix and the Spider (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp.208-227. Poggioli writes that the group of poets who began appearing after 1905, " ... were recognized as the second generation of Russian symbolists tout court, while the poets of the first generation ... were instead to be considered the Russian counterpart of European Decadence" (p.210).

after 1905, had more affinities with the French Symbolistes, and it is to this group that Blok belongs. Blok's poems were published in Merezhkovsky's Novy Put, and Blok like the elder poet, was writing out of the religious mysticism of Soloviev.

As a modern literary movement Symbolism represents part of the revolt against rationalism. Yeats felt that what symbolism offered was a nonlogical approach to understanding and a means of restoring subjectivity to a central place in the creative process. "The scientific movement", wrote Yeats, "brought with it a literature which was always tending to lose itself in externalities of all kinds ...", but this rigidity of response, he felt, would begin to recede as more attention was paid to "the element of evocation, of suggestion, upon what we call symbolism in great writers" ("The Symbolism of Poetry", reprinted in Essays and Introductions, pp. 153-164).

Through stressing the suggestive element in language Symbolism offered new planes of development for the modern poet, for in that method the relationship between word and referent is stretched so as to allow for a more individual -- and therefore subjective and relative -- response on the part of the reader. The evocativeness of the technique allowed the mind to move in an indefinite, intangible world in which subconscious responses came into play long before the work was apprehended logically. Particularly suited for the exploration of private emotional states and for what was to be increasingly recognized as the antithetical quality of emotion, Symbolism had the capacity and power to tap the unconscious experience of the individual mind, but the deep rooted feelings and sensations which the technique was to release were to become recognized -- not as individual -- but as collective in nature.

The rise of interest in Symbolism was complemented by new scholarship on mythology, for example, J.G. Frazer's The Golden Bough (1890-1915).[5] As the analogy of collective experience, myth

[5]John A Lester, Journey Through Despair, p.121.

was recognized as the expansion of symbol into stories of significance, the purpose of which was to preserve and pass on the experience of the race. As Rollo May explained it, "Both symbol and myth have the same function psychologically; they are man's way of expressing the quintessence of his experience - his way of seeing his life, his self-image and his relations to the world of his fellow men and nature - in a total figure which at the same moment carries with it the vital meaning of this experience" ("The Significance of Symbols" in Symbolism in Religion and Literature, p.34).[6] Significantly, it was upon myth and symbol that the new understandings of the nature of the unconscious mind were to be built by Freud and Jung.

To the Russian poets of both symbolist movements, Soloviev's evocative image of Sophia presented a ready-made symbol, for it carried with it all the unconscious attributes of myth described above. In the same way that Yeats was to represent Cuchulain to the Irish imagination as the symbol of their collective experience, so Sophia enshrined all elements of the collective Slavic psyche. Similarly, MacDiarmid sought and found in his own culture such symbolic representation, but he chose, not some mystical figure, but the giant tuberous thistle, an image stubbornly rooted in the material world.

Blok wrote a series of poems which had as their central symbol the image of Sophia, who is contemplated as a symbol of the Infinite which has the power to attract and repel. MacDiarmid's two adaptations of Blok are from this group, and one is taken from a translation by Mirsky, and the other from the Deutsch/Yarmolinsky anthology. The title of the latter poem is "The Unknown Woman", and again a comparison with the translation is informative,

> I have foreknown thee! Oh, I have foreknown thee. Going,
> The years have shown me Thy premonitory face.
> Intolerably clear, the farthest sky is glowing.
> I wait in silence thy withheld and worshipped grace.
> The farthest sky is glowing: white for Thy appearing.
> Yet terror clings to me. Thy image will be strange.

[6] Quoted in John A. Lester, Journey Through Despair, p.121.

And insolent suspicion will rouse upon Thy nearing.
The features long foreknown, beheld at last, will change.
How shall I then be fallen! - low, with no defender:
Dead dreams will conquer me; the glory, glimpsed, will change.
The farthest sky is glowing! Nearer looms The splendour!
Yet terror clings to me. Thy image will be strange.[7]

The vapid, Pre-Raphaelite language of the above fails to realize the dramatic tension of the piece and the pedantic rhyme scheme and over-long lines rob the poem of any music. In comparison, MacDiarmid's adaptation of the poem shows him to be a much superior versifier,

I ha'e forekent ye! O I ha'e forekent.
The years forecast your face afore they went
A licht I canna thole is in the lift.
I bide in silence your slow-comin' pace.
The ends o' space are bricht: at last - oh swift!
While terror clings to me - an unkent face!

Ill-faith stirs in me as she comes at last,
The features lang forekent...are unforecast.
O it gangs hard wi' me, I am forspent.
Deid dreams ha'e beaten me and a face unkent
And generations that I thocht unborn
Hail the strange Goddess frae my hert's-hert torn! (C.P. I,pp.90-1)

Much more conscious of the use of repetition in Blok's poem, MacDiarmid exploits it successfully. His substitution of the colloquial, hard-sounding "kent" for "know" in the opening line not only gives a correcting sharper edge to the phrase, but his replacing of the over-literary "Thy premonitory face" with "forecast", both simpler and more effective, carries the repetition of "fore" forward into the second line where it is again repeated in "afore". Such attention to rhythmic detail is characteristic of the way in which MacDiarmid tightens up the whole poem, making his own work more dense and intense than the translation. His care with internal rhythm is evident in his substitution of "Intolerably clear, the farthest sky is glowing" with the fine consonantal line "A licht I canna thole is in the lift" and the replacement of the cliché, "the farthest sky" with "The ends o' space",

[7] Modern Russian Poetry, p.128.

pushes out to the infinite in a way that the translation does not come close to rendering. Similarly, the alliterative "Dead dreams" has had its sound effect sharpened by the introduction of the colloquial pronunciation "Deid", and the strong "ee" vowel sound is carried along in the word "beaten", not only more effective rhythmically, but a much harder and active word than the soft-sounding "conquer". That whole half-line, "Deid dreams ha'e beaten me" is a fine counterbalance to "Frae my hert's hert torn", and such intricate echoing and balancing is characteristic of the rhythmic complexity MacDiarmid gives to this poem. The cumulative effect which MacDiarmid achieves is a heightening of the tension of the poem so that the drama of desire and dread which is the theme of the work is realized in a way in which sound is essential to meaning.

The unknown Goddess image of the poem is carried through A Drunk Man as a symbol of the Ideal, but, characteristically, through the muddled mind of the speaker, she is constantly confused with and transformed into one or another of the main recurring images, so that she acquires a fluidity not present in Blok's poem. In another adaptation, taken from "Psyche" by Zinaida Hippius (wife of Merezhkovsky) which is included in the Deutsch/Yarmolinsky anthology, the image of the Goddess is replaced by that of a serpent/dragon which is represented as coiling around and inseparable from the soul. The last lines of the translation read,

> And this dead thing, this loathsome black impurity,
> This horror that I shrink from-is my soul.

MacDiarmid changes this to,

> ... And this deid thing, whale-white obscenity,
> This horror that I writhe in - is my soul. (C.P. I, p.94)

The brilliant implant of the image of Ahab's whale, lifted straight from Melville's Moby Dick (1922), renders the conflict of experience so much more acutely, because it gives a ready-made, vivid and

concrete picture of the hopeless, yet obsessive, nature of the quest.

The serpent/dragon/whale image is connected by the Drunk Man to the Goddess, but he sees her image in the moon and confuses that with his drunken state, to which, in turn, he attributes the presence of the monsters. All of the images -- Goddess, moon, whisky and monsters -- converge on the central and controlling image of the giant thistle. The thistle is not only the emblem of Scotland, it is also a striking and powerful image from MacDiarmid's childhood. Once a year in Langholm, the festival of Common Riding Day is still celebrated. A very old tradition, the day is a great communal affair in which the people of the region come together to mark the boundaries of the land. Very ritualized, the ceremonies which accompany this communal celebration date back at least to the eighteenth century, but their origins are very much older. In the procession which takes place, a giant thistle is carried behind a crown of roses and a salt herring nailed within a circle of barley, reputed to be symbolic of the feudal dues to the Laird. The whole proceedings are accompanied by the music of pipe and drum and singing and dancing, and have a primitive Dionysian energy about them which goes a long way to explaining MacDiarmid's attraction to theories of resurgence.[8] The day itself is referred to in the poem in a piece which successfully captures the atmosphere of ritual,

> Drums in the Walligate, pipes in the air,
> Come and hear the cryin' o' the Fair.
>
> A' as it used to be, when I was a loon
> On Common-Ridin' Day in the Muckle Toon.
>
> The bearer twirls the Bannock-and-Saut-Herrin',
> The Croon o' Roses through the lift is farin',
>
> The aucht-fit thistle wallops on hie;
> In heather besoms A' the hills gang by ... (C.P. I, p.97)

The thistle carried in the procession is a huge plant in excess of six feet and is held aloft and twirled constantly in the air, much as a drum major twirls his baton.

[8]Hamish Henderson and Tim Neat, dirs., Tig! For the Morn's the Fair's Day, 1981. This film is a very accurate recording of the day's proceedings and many of MacDiarmid's descriptions of the day from A Drunk Man are used in the sound track.

The sight of this huge plant being thrown into the air so that it is in constant motion is both compelling and grotesque, and it is not difficult to see why such an image would become implanted in childhood memory. Throughout the poem the thistle image is presented in an almost endless number of mental pictures which explore this double quality of the plant and is the reason why, as a symbol, the thistle functions so perfectly to convey the multifarious and contradictory questions the Drunk Man explores. The thistle is seen as a "Skeleton at a tea-meetin'"; its leaves and "purple tops" are like the notes and groans of the bagpipes; it is a hugh bellows blowing out sparks to the heavens; it is like a sea of "green tides"; it is a "barren twig" representative of a land more desolate than anything in Eliot's The Waste Land (which, the Drunk Man insists, would have been a better poem had Eliot lived in Scotland's wilderness); it is like Moses' "burning bush", about to give forth some revelatory message. All of the contrary qualities of the thistle are brought together, however, when it is seen in the image of the great tree of life. With its roots deep in the earth and its branches stretching up and out heavenwards, the thistle connects the material world with the cosmos, thus, it embodies real and ideal,

> Nerves in stounds o' delight,
> Muscles in pride o' power,
> Bluid as wi' roses dight
> Life's toppin' pinnacles owre,
> The thistle yet'll unite
> Man and the Infinite! (C.P. I, 98)

The many-branched thistle, the "Hinge atween the deid and livin'", is a symbol of unity to be specifically associated with Ygdrasil, the tree of life and death in Scandinavian mythology which Carlyle described in his representation of Odin in "The Hero as Divinity".

Carlyle pictures the tree thus;

> Igdrasil, the Ash-tree of Existence, has its roots deep-down in the kingdoms of Hela or Death; its trunk reaches up heaven-high, spreads its boughs over the whole Universe: it is the Tree of Existence. At the foot of it, in the Death-kingdom, sit Three Nornas, Fates, - the Past, Present, Future; watering its roots from the Sacred Well. Its 'boughs', with their buddings and disleafings, - events, things suffered, things done, catastrophes, - stretch through all lands and times. Is not every leaf of it a biography, every fibre there an act or word? Its boughs are Histories of Nations. The rustle of it is the noise of Human Existence, onwards from of old. It grows there, the breath of Human Passion rustling through it; or, stormtost, the stormwind howling through it like the voice of all the gods. It is Igdrasil, the Tree of Existence. It is the past, the present, and the future; what was done, what is doing, what will be done.... Considering how human things circulate, each inextricably in communion with all, - how the word I speak to you today is borrowed not from Ulfila the Moesogoth only, but from all men since the first man began to speak....[9]

To Carlyle, Ygdrasil, although it was a symbol specifically associated with Nordic culture, represented the essential relationships between all life forms through all of time. This symbolic tree, however, is also found outside of Scandinavia, for as Jung interpreted it in Psychology of the Unconscious, the tree of life and death is a trans-cultural symbol. According to Jung, the mythic tree and its recurrence through time in its different aspects in various civilizations is a collective image for the development of consciousness in man. Jung wrote,

> It is well known that trees have played a large part in the cult myth from the remotest times. The typical myth is the tree of paradise or of life which we discover abundantly used in Babylonian and also in Jewish lore; and in prechristian times, the pine trees of Ahts, the tree of Mithra; in Germanic mythology, Ygdrasil, and so on. The hanging of the Attis image on the pine tree; the hanging of Marsyas, which became a celebrated artistic motive; the hanging of Odin; the Germanic hanging sacrifices - indeed, the whole series of hanged

[9] On Heroes and Hero-Worship (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872), pp.18-19.

> gods - teaches us that the hanging of Christ on the cross is not a unique occurrence in religious mythology, but belongs to the same circle of ideas as others. This contrast is not astounding just as the origin of man from trees was a legendary idea, so there were also burial customs in which people were buried in hollow trees ... keeping in mind the fact that the tree is predominantly a mother symbol, then the mystic significance of this kind of burial can be in no way incomprehensible to us. The dead are delivered back to the mother for rebirth.[10]

In outlining the evolution of consciousness, Jung demonstrated how the earliest of the tree myths suggested that man saw himself as having been born or emerged from trees, "The origin of man from trees was a legendary idea". The Crucifixion marked a whole developmental phase because it was preceded by legends of hanging Gods sacrificed on trees, all of which were related to the concept of re-birth or immortality through re-entry into the tree, a symbol of the maternal womb. The tree myth is therefore interpreted by Jung as an expression of the repressed incest wish. What the hanging God represented was an adaptation from animal nature, from the earliest age of man in which all was "simple occurrence" (p.147). The yielding of instincts which had characterized man's behaviour in his animal infancy marked a stage of growth and separation of man from his natural origins. Yet, because part of the subconscious resented the loss of animal freedom, man was left with a residue of pain, anger and guilt which related specifically to the mother because incest was now prohibitive and because it was the mother who was regarded as being responsible for "the domestication of the sons of men" (p.147).

In his extended exploration of myth, Jung made the point that dragons and serpents are the symbolic representations of anxieties which accompanied the repression of the incest wish. The dragon, for example, is,

[10] Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido: A Contribution to the History of the Evolution of Thought, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle (1919: rpt. American Edition, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), p.145.

> ... a symbol of the 'dreadful mother' of the voracious jaws of death, where men are dismembered and ground up: Whoever vanquishes this monster has gained a new or eternal youth. For this, one must, in spite of all dangers, descend into the belly of the monster (p.156).

The heroes of early legends were always, Jung claimed, those who confronted and entered "into the belly of the monster", and the prize for this descent was the conferring of immortality, "a new or eternal youth" (p.156). The sacrifice of the hero found its most complete expression in "the symbol of the crucified God. A bleeding human sacrifice was hung on the tree of life for Adam's sins", and the reward for this was not simply individual immortality for the sacrificed, but redemption and resurrection for the race. The Christian symbol was far superior to any of its predecessors because it reclaimed for man the kind of collectivity he had known in his animal past, but the new shared purpose created by the death of Christ was a development from that limited physical existence because it gave purpose to consciousness. The Crucifixion extended the spiritual life of man and established a continuum between material and eternal worlds because the sacrificed Christ had been a physical and spiritual presence. Christ effected an "orientation of the unconscious by means of imitation" because he provided an example whereby the individual sacrificed himself to a greater purpose (p.265). By taking on the burden of the pain and suffering of the race, Christ, as Jung interpreted it, released man's consciousness from repressive individual fears and made a new and collective stage in human growth possible.

While it would be mistaken to draw too rigid a comparison between Jung's theories and MacDiarmid's use of like-symbols in his poem, nevertheless it is not difficult to see how this concept of the evolution of consciousness was directly complementary to what MacDiarmid had found in the works of Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Soloviev. Certainly,

the more hypothetical aspects of Jung's theory would have been of less interest to MacDiarmid than the way in which Jung demonstrated the power and universality of symbol, which was the part of Jung's work which appealed to poets, and particularly, as was pointed out earlier, to Edwin Muir who was living in Montrose during the years in which MacDiarmid was writing A Drunk Man and who was still a close friend of MacDiarmid's at that stage.

That MacDiarmid invested his thistle/tree image with the same kind of expansiveness as is found in Jung's theories, is evident from the way in which the thistle becomes associated with a series of heroes to be regarded as martyrs for the historical evolution of consciousness -- Christ, Dostoevsky, Herman Melville and the Drunk Man himself. Each is seen as having had to contend in some way with the crisis and contradiction of his material existence, and with the need to find and establish some kind of expansive spirituality. When the Drunk Man looks at the giant thistle he feels diminished and lost beside the image of the endless universe it represents. The sheer spatial and temporal dimension of the universe, the Drunk Man sees, reduces human life to insignificance, for on the tree of existence,

> ... what's an atom o' a twig
> That tak's a billion to an inch
> To a' the routh o' shoots that mak'
> The bygrowth o' the Earth aboot
> The michty trunk o' Space that spreids
> Ramel o' licht that ha'e nae end,
> - The trunk wi' centuries for rings,
> Comets for fruit, November shoo'ers
> For leafs that in its Autumns fa'
> - And Man at maist o' sic a twig
> Ane o' the coontless atoms is! ... (C.P. I, p.130)

Man's diminutive part in the cosmic scale robs him of any real significance, even as a conscious being. Yet, the Drunk Man feels, there has to be some purpose to the human presence, even if it is

not fully possible for man to understand the nature of that purpose.

As the Drunk Man contemplates the image of the thistle, he suddenly sees it extending into the far reaches of space until it is transformed into the image of redemption, the Cross,

> Aye, this is Calvary - to bear
> Your Cross wi' in you frae the seed,
> And feel it grow by slow degrees
> Until it rends your flesh apairt ... (C.P. I, p.134)

Here, the Drunk Man recognizes that the only way to understand or participate in life's purpose is to accept the limitations of material existence, and accept them joyously as Nietzsche had directed, for even although such an acceptance involves suffering and pain, nevertheless, it is from these that the new God-like man will come. "I'm fu' o' a stickit God", the Drunk Man cries, as he suffers the phantom pain of childbirth, the metaphor Soloviev had used to describe the coming into being of a new kind of consciousness. And the Christ of the future? Dostoevsky, who had signalled a new historical cycle when he explored the contradictions of consciousness and given knew purpose to the Slav races, is, says the Drunk Man, quoting directly from Spengler, "This Christ o' the neist thousand years".

It is with Dostoevsky that the Drunk Man chooses to align himself, wishing to effect in Scotland what Dostoevsky had achieved in Russia,

> I, in the Thistle's land,
> As you in Russia where
> Struggle in giant form
> Proceeds for evermair,
>
> In my sma' measure 'bood
> Address a similar task
> And for a share o' your
> Appallin' genius ask ... (C.P. I, pp.137-8)

Dostoevsky had built his life upon "The everloupin' fountain/That

frae the dark ascends", he had chosen to explore the dark recesses of the mind. In that sense he was like Melville, for Melville too saw that the mind was "But as a floatin' iceberg/That hides aneth the sea". Melville, "Before whose wand Leviathan/Rose hoary-white upon the deep", is called upon by the Drunk Man to help him understand "what this Russian has to teach". The only way to understanding, the Drunk Man comes to see, is to descend into the belly of the monster, and that, for a Scot, means seeking out the roots of the thistle,

> Let a' the thistle's growth
> Be as a process, then,
> My spirit's gane right through,
> And needna threid again,
> Tho' in it sall be haud'n
> For aye the feck o' men
> Wha's queer contortions there
> As memories I ken,
> As memories o' my ain
> O' mony an ancient pain ... (C.P. I, p.141)

The Drunk Man sees his task as that of becoming part of the thistle's growth, and he can only do that by experiencing the past suffering of the race, by knowing "mony an ancient pain". What he realizes is that this is exactly what Dostoevsky had to do. The Russian had assumed the collective pain of his race and by exploring the depths of this pain within his own being, by entering into chaos, had performed the redemptive act,

> Thou, Dostoevski, understood,
> Wha had your ain land in your bluid,
> And into it as in a mould
> The passion o' your bein' rolled ... (C.P. I, p.144)

But the Drunk Man questions whether it is really possible for him to perform a similar feat, whether or not Scotland can become for him a big enough symbol of a force which will allow for the creation of purpose out of the contraries of the Scottish character, in the way that Dostoevsky had created a vision of unity for his race,

For a' that's Scottish is in me,
As a' things Russian were in thee,
And I in turn 'ud be an action
To put into concrete abstraction
My country's contrair qualities,
And mak' a unity o' these
Till my love owre its history dwells,
As owretone to a peal o' bells ... (C.P. I, p.145)

However, the Drunk Man does not proceed on his course easily. In one of the many interludes that interrupt his philosophical questioning and which give the work as a whole its tension of opposites, the Drunk Man cries to his wife, Jean, to release him from these obsessive preoccupations and let him once again "move/ In the peculiar licht o' love". He asks her to,

... liberate me frae this tree,
As wha had there imprisoned me,
The end achieved - or show me at the least
Mair meanin' in't, and hope o' bein' released. (C.P. I, p.146)

Like Christ on the Cross, the Drunk Man is not a completely passive sufferer and pleads to be released from his commitment, seeing his quest as possibly meaningless and having to pay too high a price in human terms for its realization.

As in MacDiarmid's early lyrics, there is a constant juxtaposition of the domestic and the metaphysical. The Drunk Man will refer to his wife, to his drinking cronies, to topical conversational concerns("Where's Isadora Duncan dancin' noo?") and will constantly interrupt his metaphysical flights with whisky-induced hiccups, all of which not only give highly amusing interludes, but serve the essential purpose of grounding the larger questions he is raising. Similarly, the abstractions of the poem are rendered in mainly simple, familiar images. For example,

I tae ha'e heard Eternity drip water
(Aye water, water!) drap by drap
On the a'e nerve, like lichtnin', I've become,
And heard God passin' wi' a bobby's feet
Ootby in the lang coffin o' the street ... (C.P. I, p.147)

Such concretization of Eternity as an incessantly dripping tap and God as the oppressive authority of a policeman's footsteps in the night, translates these vague, disturbing abstracts into a more immediately identifiable pain and fear.

In a sudden revelation, the Drunk Man sees the thistle metamorphose into a great "mony-brainchin' candelabra" which lights up the sky, yet, in its form reminds the Drunk Man of another sea monster, an outstretched octopus. The candelabra which illuminates the universe offers a vision of light and points towards the heavens and God, but the "octopus creation wallops/In coontless faddoms o' a nameless sea". The Drunk Man not only sees that the thistle encompasses within itself the heights and depths of existence, the ideal and the real, but he also recognizes his own at-oneness with such a duality,

> I am the candelabra, and burn
> My endless candles to an Unkent God.
> I am the mind and meanin' o' the octopus
> That thraws its empty airms through a' th' Inane ... (C.P. I, p.148)

As in "I Heard Christ Sing", the Drunk Man recognizes that good and evil, heaven and hell, death and life are inseparable from one another,

> O little Life
> In which Daith guises and deceives itsel',
> Joy that mak's Grief a Janus,
> Hope that is Despair's fause-face,
> And Guid and Ill that are the same,
> Save as the chance licht fa's! (C.P. I, p.149)

Accepting that both aspects of the life process reside within himself, the Drunk Man recognizes that it was this fact which Dostoevsky had to teach, for he now associates the thistle with Dostoevsky's disease -- epilepsy, and sees it writhing in a fit in which its essence is exposed,

> The epileptic thistle twitches
> (A trick o wund or mune or ween - or whisky).
> A brain laid bare,
> A nervous system,
> The skeleton wi' which men labour ... (C.P. I, p.149)

Now actively accepting that the road forward must also be a leap into chaos, the Drunk Man sees himself caught together with Dostoevsky in a snowstorm which carries them outward to "Oblivion",

> The wan leafs shak' atour us like the snaw,
> Here is the cavaburd in which Earth's tint.
> There's naebody but Oblivion and us,
> Puir gangrel buddies, waunderin' hameless in't ...
>
> I ken nae Russian and you ken nae Scots,
> We canna tell oor voices frae the wund.
> The snaw is seekin' everywhere; oor herts
> At last like roofless ingles it has f'und,
>
> And gethers there in drift on endless drift,
> Oor broken herts that it can never fill:
> And still - its leafs like snaw, its growth like wund —
> The thistle rises and forever will! (C.P. I, pp.151-2)

Out of the chaos the thistle continues to emerge, so that within that very condition, the Drunk Man realizes, survival and significance can be sustained.

From this revelation the Drunk Man has a vision of unity which he expresses by quoting from Dante's Paradiso.[11] The extremes with which he has been concerned, his attempts to find some way of linking the material and spiritual universe, are brought together in the image of a giant wheel,

> And see I noo a great wheel move,
> And a' the notions that I love
> Drap into stented groove and groove? ... (C.P. I, pp.158)

In the circumference of the wheel's circle all things are brought into relation so that what had seemed parallel or "irreconcilable" are in fact in conjunction. Like the wheel of Yeats's A Vision, this too will take its alloted time to complete a single revolution,

> Twenty-six thousand years it tak's
> Afore a'e single roond it mak's,
> And syne it melts as it were wax.
>
> The Phoenix guise't'll rise
> Is mair than Euclid or Einstein
> Can dream ... (C.P. I, p.159)

[11] C.P., pp.153-4. The quotation is, "Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,/Legato con amore in un volume... Cio che per l'universo si squaderna;/Sustanzia ed accidenti, e lor costume,/Quasi conflati insieme per tal modo ... Che cio ch'io dico è un semplice lume." The translation given in C.P. is from Wicksteed, canto xxxiii, 85-90, and reads, "Within its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the scattered leaves of all the universe; substance and accidents and their relations, as though together fused, after such fashion that what I tell of is one simple flame".

Within the wheel, historical events become so condensed that major events merge. Terrestrial and heavenly wars are seen to be related,

> Upon the high circumference are
> As neebor points the Heavenly War
> That dung doun Lucifer sae far,
>
> And that upheaval in which I
> Sodgered 'neth the Grecian sky
> And in Italy and Marseilles,
>
> And there isna room for men
> Wha the haill o' history ken
> Tae pit a pin twixt then and then ... (C.P. I, p.159)

Similarly, when evolution is viewed from the perspective of the wheel, man, and even Christ, share the same animal origins,

> And Jesus and a nameless ape
> Collide and share the selfsame shape
> That nocht terrestrial can escape. (C.P. I, p.160)

The Drunk Man sees that his task in such a seemingly predetermined process is to somehow join with the force which has set up the wheel,

> Nae verse is worth a ha'et until
> It can join issue wi' the Will
> That raised the Wheel and spins it still ... (C.P. I, p.160)

The task and meaning of his life is to find a way of aligning himself with the greater life process, which is expressed in terms of Nietzsche's Will.

As the wheel spins, the Drunk Man whirls around in its movement, spinning together with some of Scotland's famous characters,

> I felt it turn, and syne I saw
> John Knox and Clavers in my raw,
> And Mary Queen o' Scots ana',
>
> And Rabbie Burns and Weelum Wallace,
> And Carlyle lookin' unco gallus,
> And Harry Lauder (to enthrall us).
>
> And as I looked I saw them a',
> A' the Scots baith big and sma',
> That e'er the braith o' life did draw ... (C.P. I, p.164)

The Drunk Man looks disparagingly at his race's representatives and asks why is it that in this "Heterogeneous hotch and rabble" he is the one to be "condemned to squabble". The answer is immediate and is consistent with what he had earlier recognized as being the nature of Dostoevsky's commitment to his racial origins,

> 'A Scottish poet maun assume
> The burden o' his people's doom,
> And dee to brak' their livin' tomb' ... (C.P. I, p.165)

As a poet and a Scot, the Drunk Man, recognizes that his path lies in being the one to recreate the conscience of the race, and the poem ends with his acceptance of that fact and to the possibilities inherent in it with the lyric to Silence,

> Yet ha'e I Silence left, the croon o' a'.
>
> No' her, wha on the hills langsyne I saw
> Liftin' a foreheid o' perpetual snaw.
>
> No' her, wha in the how-dumb-deid o' nicht
> Kyths, like Eternity in Time's despite.
>
> No' her, withooten shape, wha's name is Daith,
> No Him, unkennable abies to faith
>
> - God whom, gin e'er He saw a man, 'ud be
> E'en mair dumfooner'd at the sicht than he
>
> - But Him, whom nocht in man or Deity,
> Or Daith or Dreid or Laneliness can touch,
> Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much.
>
> O I ha'e Silence left,
>
> - 'And weel ye micht,'
> Sae Jean'll say, 'efter sic a nicht!' (C.P. I, p.166-7)

Such a brief outline can hardly do more than suggest the range and scope of this work, but what will be apparent is the extraordinary fusion of ideas which takes place within its form. From his initial understanding of antithesis as the aesthetic of his native tradition, MacDiarmid extended his apprehension of the concept, through his knowledge of Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Soloviev, to metaphysical issues, so that antithesis defined for him the conflict of real and ideal,

conscious and unconscious, Apollo and Dionysos and Classical and Romantic. The sense of process on both an artistic and historical level which MacDiarmid was able to employ from his understanding of the clash of opposites was, however, to undergo a further extension and re-emerge in future years as the dialectic of bourgeoisie and proletariat.

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PART THREE: THE POLITICAL MAN

Chapter Ten

Scottish Nationalism

The literary movement which MacDiarmid spearheaded had as its goal political independence for Scotland. In the Irish example, MacDiarmid had, close to home, a very clear cut demonstration of what could be achieved through the force of letters, and, indeed, his insistence upon the linguistic differences between Scotland and England had the Irish Gaelic revival as a model of precedent.

MacDiarmid gave a new distinctiveness to Scots by using the language to discuss serious philosophical and social questions. Prior to his work literary Scots had found an outlet mainly in the works of men like J.M. Barrie, where vernacular was used for comic effect. The vernacular writers of the 1890's, the Kailyaird school, presented Scots as the language of couthy characters, words spoken by good-hearted but mainly simple-minded parochials, and these authors generally provided an attractive picture of Scottish life in which the turbulent past was suppressed in favour of a set of stock characters -- Bonnie Prince Charlie, Mary Queen of Scots, Robert the Bruce -- and so on. This kind of historical distortion was a necessary part of representing Scottish culture as a pleasant pastoral in which the simple life, poor as it was, was also that of the highest virtue. Such a picture of social stability was often comforting, particularly to those who through enforced emigration had been exposed to the harsher realities of the Scottish economy, yet looked to such works for an affirmation of their cultural identity, as well as more attractive memories of the past. But the national picture the Kailyairders drew was one unrelated to the problems of Scottish society, particularly to the slum squalor and industrial unrest which was taking place in the major cities, and which was to be consistently ignored

by these writers. Consequently, the representation of Scottish life put forward by the writers of the 1890's was one which held no political threat. Indeed, the portrayal of an attractive peasantry, contented in their poverty, supported the continuation of a paternalistic governmental order administered from without.[1]

In the period following World War One there was, however, a reaction against such literary simplifications of Scottish life and culture which was part of the general pattern of frustration and discontent in post-war Europe, and which was to manifest itself in attacks on established institutions and traditional values and ideals. (Hanham, p.149) MacDiarmid's campaign against the Burns cult was itself a part of that reaction and also belonged to the emergence of a new critical attitude in Scotland, for in these years, a new journalism which was to become preoccupied with the questions of language, culture and political independence became identifiable. It has been suggested that this journalism which produced a prolific burst of articles and reviews in newspapers and magazines, was to prove to be the contemporary Scottish equivalent of the nineteenth-century European literary salon,[2] and from the comments MacDiarmid was making in S.C. editorials, it is clear that he was drawing on this new strength. MacDiarmid recognized that this new burst of writing was an important cultural development which could be used for both literary and political ends and he obviously related his own role in this movement to that of Soloviev and his literary criticism in Moscow in the 1890's and to Orage and his success with N.A. The new journalism in Scotland effected a synthesis similar to what had been achieved earlier in Russia and England, for it brought together groups who had previously been isolated in a way which allowed them to discover similarities of interests and which led ultimately to a unified literary and political movement committed to independence for Scotland.

[1] H.J. Hanham, Scottish Nationalism (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp.147-8.

[2] Hanham, p.148. In documenting the emergence of this journalism, Hanham writes that this sudden burst of activity suggested that "there was an economic basis for a national literary movement comparable with that which had occurred in various parts of Europe almost a century before ... [it] became the equivalent of the Czech drawing-rooms before 1848 and the literary salon for Young Ireland in the 1830's".

The Scottish Review (1914-1920) and the Gaelic Guth na Bliadhna (The Voice of the Year) (1904-1925) were two journals which played an important part in the developing movement. (Hanham, p.135) Among the contributors were James Maxton of the I.L.P., J.M. Hogge a Liberal M.P., Lewis Spence a poet and journalist, the historian Robert Rait and a number of leading Trade Unionists, as well as assorted members of various smaller groups. Great emphasis was placed on labour and economic interests in these periodicals and they thus provided an important and pragmatic background to the vision of a cultural renaissance being put forward by MacDiarmid. What developed was not only a greater interchange of ideas and new and stimulating discussions of chronic problems, but a unity centring on the whole question of language. Erskine of Marr was both editor of Guth na Bliadhna and leader of a Gaelic revival movement modelled on the Sinn Fein in Ireland, and he adopted the slogan "No Language: No Nation". (Hanham, p.123) Never tired of pointing out that it was a Scot, James Connolly, who had been at the centre of the Easter Rising, Erskine of Marr argued that Scotland had to detach itself from Anglo-Saxon interests (as Patrick Geddes had done before him) and rebuild its identity in terms of its Celtic heritage. (Hanham, p.123) He found many supporters among non-Gaelic speakers, including MacDiarmid and Lewis Spence, for by putting the stress on linguistic difference as the manifestation of cultural and political problems, Erskine of Marr took the nationalist movement into a new developmental phase and went beyond any previous historical attempts to demand the right to self-government for Scotland. (Hanham, p.123)

There had in fact been many previous attempts to achieve political independence, dating back to the Union of the Crowns in 1603 when James VI of Scotland ascended the throne of England, uniting the two kingdoms and beginning what is still today an uneasy relation

between the two countries. The alliance between Scotland and England was formally incorporated in the Act of Union in 1707, but the union was never popular, despite the fact that Scotland kept her own legal, banking, educational and administrative systems, as well as her own church. Economic stability was always given as the main reason for the union, but, Scotland never seemed to prosper at the same rate as her neighbour to the south with the result that in times of severe economic depression there always arose movements committed to re-locating government in Scotland.[3]

From the Jacobite Rebellions on there were recurrent Nationalist movements, none of which were successful. Indeed, most often the leaders of such movements when caught were either hanged or transported to the Colonies. By the mid-nineteenth century however, stronger and better organized groups were beginning to demand new powers for Scotland. In 1853, the National Association for Vindication of Scottish Rights campaigned for the restoration of the Secretaryship of State which had lapsed since 1746. Rosebery was appointed Secretary of State for Scotland, but not until 1881, and the full proposals of the National Association were not met until 1926.

The Scottish Home Rule Association formed itself in 1886 and was an all party group led by the Liberals (who had the majority of Scottish seats between 1832 and 1914) but backed by leading Tories and early Socialists like Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald. Parallel to the growth of this organisation emerged the Scottish Labour Party (1888), the I.L.P. (1893) and the Scottish Trade Union Congress (1893). The Home Rule Bill of 1913 represented the most successful attempt up until that date to establish independent government in Scotland and was about to be passed when war was declared.

[3]The following are the primary sources of the history of Scottish Nationalism,

William Ferguson, Scotland: 1689 to the Present (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1968).

H.J. Hanham, Scottish Nationalism (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

The Scottish Debate: Essays on Scottish Nationalism, ed. N. MacCormick (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Tom Nairn, The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism (London: NLB, 1977).

Individual sources of information will be identified in context.

During the war itself there was a great deal of political unrest in Scotland, particularly on Clydeside where John MacLean, who after the 1917 Revolution was to be appointed Soviet Consul in Britain, was declaiming Marx's principles to the workers. MacLean, in keeping with Lenin's stand on the right to self-determination for small nations, declared himself a committed nationalist and formed a Scottish Workers' Republican Party founded on Marxist ideals. Imprisoned during the war, he stood for Gorbals in the 1918 General Election, but was defeated. Constantly compared to Parnell, MacLean was seen as a great Nationalist leader, but he died in 1923 before the movement was really underway.

In post-war Scotland the economic chaos was sufficient confirmation for many of the validity of the ideas MacLean had been preaching. The centres of heavy industry, such as Clydeside, had in the post-war depression come to a standstill which resulted in a reduced demand for coal and steel, which in turn was to lead to widespread unemployment.[4] There was little local industry outside of coal, steel and shipbuilding, and even what there was, the fishing trade for example, had had its markets destroyed by the war. (Ferguson, p.362) Unemployment became epidemic in Britain in the 1920's, but in traditionally depressed areas like Wales and Scotland the effects were more severe than in the rest of the country. In Scotland itself this economic unrest led to an increase in nationalist sentiment and the membership of the Scottish Home Rule Association under the leadership of R.A. Muirhead began to grow rapidly.

It was during this period that MacDiarmid began acting as chief propagandist for the S.H.R.A., writing articles under the pseudonym "Mountboy" and "Special Correspondent" which were syndicated to over two hundred newspapers.[5] Through the pages of S.C. he had begun to

[4]William Ferguson, Scotland: 1689 to the Present, p.361.

[5]These articles are now located in Edinburgh University Library.

provide an intellectual foundation for the emerging movement and his own literary ability was a positive sign of a new nationalist energy. By 1926 through Contemporary Scottish Studies, a series written by MacDiarmid for The Scottish Educational Journal, he had with the aid of Lewis Spence, Erskine of Marr and R.H. Muirhead, and many and varied comments and attacks from assorted readers of the journal, assumed leadership of a proposed cultural renaissance which it was felt would lead ultimately to political independence. The publication of MacDiarmid's first two collections of poetry in the same time period and the fact that he wrote in a language which was now culturally distinctive was seen as an act of faith in the power of Scotland to secure its independence.

MacDiarmid's poetry did of course have a very strong appeal to the socialist movement. One of the central poems of A Drunk Man was written about the General Strike of 1926, and in it, MacDiarmid, using the image of his thistle/rose, recorded that historic event as the beginning of the "flowering" of working class potential,

> I saw a rose come loupin' oot
> Frae a camsteerie plant.
> O wha'd ha'e thocht yon puir stock had
> Sic an inhabitant?
>
> For centuries it ran to waste,
> Wi' pin-heid floo'ers at times.
> O'ts hidden hert o' beauty they
> Were but the merest skimes.
>
> Yet while it ran to wud and thorns
> The feckless growth was seekin'
> Some airt to cheenge its life until
> A' in a rose was beekin'...

The allegorical rose goes on to question how it can best come to blossom,

> 'What hinders me unless I lack
> Some needfu' discipline?
> - I wis I'll bring my orra life
> To beauty or I'm din!'
>
> Sae ran the thocht that hid ahint
> The thistle's ugsome guise,
> 'I'll brak' the bait o' my life
> A worthier to devise.

'My nobler instincts sall nae mair
This contrair shape be gi'en.
I sall nae mair consent to live
A life no' fit to be seen'... (C.P. I, pp.119-122)

This simple, yet forceful, expression of socialist ideals would obviously have had a more direct appeal to a larger majority than some of MacDiarmid's more extreme and obscure theories, and it is easy to see why, by producing such poems as the above, the traditional barriers between the practical men of action and the intellectual men of letters dissolved enough for them to form a common front.

By 1928 there existed several different groups of Nationalists: the Scottish Home Rule Association, the Scots National League and the Scottish National movement. (Hanham, p.150) In October of that year the Glasgow University Rectorial election was to prove to be the catalyst which transformed these groups into the National Party of Scotland. The Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, was the favourite candidate and it was expected that he would be elected by a landslide. But the newly formed Glasgow University Scottish Nationalists proposed Cunninghame-Graham as a more appropriate choice for a Scottish university. (Hanham, p.151) G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc had promised to speak on Cunninghame-Graham's behalf, but when they could not come their places were taken by Compton MacKenzie and MacDiarmid. (Hanham, p.151) MacDiarmid, accustomed to addressing crowds from his I.L.P. days, gave a stirring performance, and the meeting, although it did not succeed in getting its candidate elected, was a clear cut demonstration that a vigorous nationalist spirit was alive, particularly among the country's youth. (Hanham, p.151)

Subsequently, the Nationalist Party was formed and for a time unified the previously separate elements in the movement. Four parliamentary candidates, of whom MacDiarmid was one, were put forward

for the 1929 General Election. The policy of the new party was complete self-government and while committed to that ideal, its greatest weakness in its early years was lack of political expertise and a failure to build the party machinery up from a grassroots level, deficiences which led to the party being defeated in the election. (Hanham, p.152) The difficulty with party cohesiveness was another problem, for many members were committed to socialist and Trade Unionist causes which were much larger in scope and which tended to see Scotland's economic problems as only part of the larger social and economic inequalities operating throughout Europe. While the Scottish Council of the Labour Party supported Home Rule on the face of things it also warned its members against the problem of divided loyalties and discouraged membership in the S.H.R.A., a position which was also to be taken up by the S.T.U.C. who in 1931 withdrew support for Home Rule. (Hanham, p.113)

After the failure of the party in the election there followed a purge which was to lead to MacDiarmid's expulsion in 1933, and which was to be accompanied by an attack on the whole concept of a vernacular revival, carried out primarily by MacDiarmid's former friend and ally, Edwin Muir. Muir had never had MacDiarmid's sense of mission for the nationalist cause, and, having lived in England for a number of years had distanced himself from the problems of Scottish culture. Returning for a visit, his impressions reveal an unsympathetic attitude. He wrote,

> Though Scotland has not been a nation for some time, it has possessed a distinctly marked style of life; and that is now falling to pieces, for there is no visible and effective power to hold it together. There is such a visible and effective power to conserve the life of England; and though in English life, too, a similar change of national characteristics is going on, though the old England is disappearing, there is no danger that England should cease to be itself. But all that Scotland possesses is its style of life; once it loses that it loses everything, and is nothing more than a name on a map (Scottish Journey (London: Hogarth, 1935, pp.25-6)).

Muir had been brought up in Orkney and had only known misery when the family moved to Glasgow, which was certainly something which coloured his view of life on the Scottish mainland. In addition, Muir achieved literary recognition in the south and was rapidly becoming a part of the London literary establishment and therefore much more prepared to favour that way of life. MacDiarmid, on the other hand, had had a desperate time in London, an experience which only sharpened his natural inclination to "Anglophobia" and made him permanently antagonistic to the pose of English superiority. Thus, it was almost inevitable that these two should find themselves on opposite sides of the fence. Muir did not openly attack MacDiarmid, but the motive behind the writing of Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer (1936) was the destruction of MacDiarmid's reputation and of the whole vernacular movement. The title of Muir's work has little to do with the content, for what he was addressing himself to was the need for Scottish writers to abandon completely any attempts to resuscitate the language and opt instead for complete Anglicization. He wrote,

> A Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice except to absorb the English tradition, and that if he thoroughly does so his work belongs not merely to Scottish literature but to English literature as well. On the other hand, if he wishes to add to an indigenous Scottish literature, and roots himself deliberately in Scotland, he will find there no matter how long he may search, neither an organic community to round off his conceptions, nor a major literary tradition to support him, not even a faith among the people themselves that a Scottish literature is possible or desirable, nor any opportunity, finally, of making a livelihood by his work. All these things are part of a single problem which can only be understood by considering Scottish literature historically and the qualities in the Scottish people which have made them what they are; it cannot be solved by writing poems in Scots, or by looking forward to some hypothetical Scotland in the future (pp. 15-16).

Here, Muir not only romanticizes the English tradition as a product of an "organic community", but he never considers that the problem of the English dialect speaker -- or for that matter any European dialect speaker -- is identical to that of the Scot. The use of dialect is simply dismissed by Muir as a kind of chronic immaturity, for he feels dialect is to "a homogeneous language what the babbling of children is to the speech of grown men and women.... To most of us who were born and brought up in Scotland dialect Scots is associated with childhood, and English with maturity" (p.70). This is a patronizing attitude which fails to take account of the fact that what really separates the dialect speaker from the "English" speaker is a class difference, and that consequently these two groups do represent different ideals and traditions, even outside of national boundaries. MacDiarmid was never blind, in the way that Muir seems to have been, to the fact that he was giving expression to a channel of experience which had had little outlet in the tradition Muir hallowed and MacDiarmid's purpose was never, in Eliot's phrase, "to purify the dialect of the tribe", but to do the opposite, that is, use the concretizing expressiveness of the vernacular to inject into a language which had become effete with abstraction, a new vitality.

However, in the mid-thirties the whole question of the vernacular revival and Scottish independence which Muir and MacDiarmid were confronting each other over, was beginning to seem trivial compared to what was building up between the conflicting ideologies of Fascism and Communism. The commitment to political independence was to be swamped by the scale of world events, and MacDiarmid, like almost every other intellectual of the day, was to become a Communist, officially joining the party in 1934.

MacDiarmid's move to Communism was accompanied by a distinct shift in his literary style and by a reformulation of his aesthetic of anti-

thetical process from the Caledonian Antisyzygy to that of the "dialectic", and in order to have some understanding as to why such a development was recognized by MacDiarmid to be completely continuous with his earlier beliefs and commitments, it is first necessary to sketch out the basics of the philosophy Marx called dialectical materialism.

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Chapter Eleven

Dialectical Materialism

The ideas of Marx and Engels have their foundation in two distinct streams of philosophy, mechanistic materialism and the concept of historical process defined by Hegel as the dialectic, the fusion of which into one system not only seemed to resolve the traditional crux of Western philosophy -- mind/body duality -- but developed into a prescription for revolution.

Marx's materialism has its origins in the atomic theory of Democritus (on whom Marx wrote his doctoral thesis) which advanced the idea that the world was composed of a concourse of atoms. According to such a scheme the universe was to be seen as one in which solid matter moved through empty space, and such movement, which extended to the states and actions of men, was recognized as predetermined.[1] To this concept of a determined universe, Epicurus introduced the principle of free will by asserting that the element of chance entered into the motion of atoms, causing deviation and change. Man, Epicurus observed, had the capacity to create or refrain from action, but the exercise of that choice lay within the individual and not in some divine power.[2] To Epicurus, body and soul were not separate but interdependent structures and he attacked Plato's theology on the grounds that any notion of heavenly control over the actions of men was an instrument of fear rooted in superstition and irrationality and would be used to manipulate minds for political ends.[3]

Materialism as a philosophy which dismissed the concept of external spiritual direction was obviously not compatible with the doctrines of Christianity, so under a theology dominated by the ideas of Augustus and Aquinas, the philosophy of materialism lay fallow. The work of Scotus, referred to earlier in relation to the concept of haecceitas,

[1] Frederick A. Lange, History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance, trans. E.C. Thomas, (London: Trubner, 1877), I, p.19.

[2] Lange, p.107.

[3] Lange, pp.101-2.

however, constituted a major attempt to reintroduce the notion of the universe as one complete and interacting system. Against the idea of a great chain of being at the top of which presided the Divine, Scotus gave a picture of a world in process in which every object had an individuality which attested to the variety, multiplicity and concrete presence of God in his universe. Scotus described metaphysics as the "transcending science" and recognized that philosophical stance as the most comprehensive and authentic approach to knowledge of the real and the ideal.[4]

Displacing, as it did, the earth from the centre of the universe, the Copernican revolution in perception represented the most serious threat to Christian doctrine. In the great reorientation which followed this new understanding, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) in interpreting Copernicanism, extended his knowledge to conceive of the universe as that which moved in infinite space and was inhabited by innumerable worlds.[5] To Bruno, God and the universe were two names for one and the same reality, seen, on the one hand, as the essence of all things, and on the other, as the realized possibilities in which that essence makes itself known. Thus, this was a universe which proceeded by contraries, a constant going forth from and returning back to the whole.[6] As all elements were part of this process, the human soul at death was not committed to heaven or hell, but was simply reabsorbed into the divine light.[7] The church regarded Bruno as a terrible heretic, for which, as Joyce's Stephen remarks in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Bruno was "terribly burned". Giordano Bruno, together with Vico, represented to Joyce, one of those thinkers whose ideas had seemed incompatible with the Western philosophical tradition, yet, offered a conception of the universe which was particularly appealing to the modern mind. Similarly, the concept of Sophia adopted

[4]Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, p.2.

[5]Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p.244.

[6]Yates, p.279.

[7]Yates, p.280.

by Soloviev as an expression of the eternal flux which partakes simultaneously of the material and the spiritual has its source in the same hermetic tradition from which Bruno's ideas were developed.[8]

The growth of materialism as a philosophy after the sixteenth century was to be very much related to the claims of practical and political reality, and was based on observation of the actual world, of how men behaved in their day-to-day lives. Both Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Hobbes (1588-1679) formulated the idea that the lives of men were completely controlled by political expediency. To Machiavelli, Christianity, once a politically cohesive force, could no longer act as a stabilizing power in society, so in the place of religion, he advocated patriotism. The state, according to Machiavelli, embodied the motive of self-interest which was at the heart of all men's actions, and therefore, he claimed, that the only test of good or bad action was what best served the interests of the state. The Prince who could control his state owed allegiance to no man and should acquire his power "either by fortune or ability".[9] Might was right, and the only reality in the city state was power, the just reward of ruthless princes like Cesare Borgia.

Likewise, in the political turmoil of seventeenth century England, Hobbes recognized man's natural state to be that of anarchy. Formal agreements or "Covenant" which limited man's brutish tendencies, were seen as the only way of establishing just communities.[10] Religious

[8] Z.Z. Zenkovsky, A History of Russian Philosophy, p.3. Zenkovsky points out that the emphasis placed by Bruno and the hermetics on the power of intuitive knowledge was particularly attractive to Soloviev and represented to him an authentic way of knowing which lay outside philosophical theories. The emphasis on the metaphysical would also have appealed to Soloviev's strong religious temperament.

[9] The Prince, trans. Daniel Donno (New York: Bantam, 1966), p.249.

[10] Leviathan, ed. C.B. MacPherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.228.

belief, particularly the divine inspiration claimed by the Puritans was, to Hobbes, irrational and not to be trusted as a natural base for morality. There was, however, a practical use in organized religious belief, for, Hobbes claimed, it was an effective means of controlling the mob. Like Machiavelli, Hobbes believed man's actions were always in the direction of self-preservation, and given that that was the state of things, Hobbes saw that government would be obeyed when the consequences of disorder were shown to be intolerable.

The advance of scientific rationalism which followed on the establishment of Newton's physics as a world picture, was to be accompanied by the gradual deterioration of the supremacy of religious belief as the prime organizing principle of Western civilization, and its end was hastened by the nineteenth-century theories of material and animal evolution. Charles Lyell (1797-1875) detached the interpretation of the universe as laid down in Genesis from his geological research. From the study of fossil remains in rock faces, Lyell recognized that the earth had developed over a vast time scale. He set out to show in his Principles of Geology, that currently observable geological processes, such as the action of sea, wind and rain, and natural catastrophes like volcanoes and earthquakes were adequate ways of explaining the geological history of more ancient periods and that it was possible to judge the age of different parts of the earth's crust by the proportion of recent extinct species of fossils and shells.

The corollary of Lyell's theories was that, like the age of the geological earth, the antiquity of man must be far greater than had been generally assumed. Darwin (1809-1882) not only confirmed this view but in The Origin of Species (1859) set out the possibility that man had developed from lower life forms. The origin of man could

thus be explained without resorting to supernatural explanations and the universe, in which man could no longer be regarded as existing autonomously, was now to be interpreted as being solely a material reality.

From post-Darwinian biology emerged Naturalism which held the view that man belongs entirely in the order of nature. Man was to be seen as merely a higher-order animal whose character and fate were determined by the forces of heredity and environment. Personal characteristics and instincts were passed on from previous generations and like social conditions and circumstances, could not be altered. In his social standing man was completely subject to the economic forces of the family, class and general social milieu into which he had been born and his whole existence explained by predetermined hereditary and economic forces.

The materialism of Marx incorporated within it certain of the deterministic elements of Naturalism, but while Marx saw it as a necessity to discern laws of human society, he also believed that once human history had been perceived, recorded and interpreted, it might be possible to predict how these laws would develop in the future. Like earlier materialists, Marx saw the external world as the only reality. All forms of life partook of that reality, including the "civil society" of man, for such human structures as had been created could "neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but ... are rooted in the materialist conditions of life".[11] Where Marx's philosophy was markedly different from that of other materialists was that although the universe was seen as predetermined in the general sense, that world was not fixed in immutable modes in time and space. It was evident that the society of man had grown and changed through history. Progressive social, intellectual and spiritual evolution had occurred and would continue to develop because the universe was one of process.

[11] "The Materialist Conception of History" in Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, eds. T.B. Bottomore and Maximilian Rubel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pps.67-8.

The conception of process is the dynamic element of Marx's philosophy which owes its genesis to Hegel's dialectic. O.E.D. gives the root of the word: Latin -- dialectic/us, Greek -- διαλεκτική (τέχνη) meaning "discourse" or "converse". The history of the word is traced first to Socrates, whose method of resolving issues through the dialogue of question and answer, is considered close to the sense of the original. In Plato's Republic "dialectic" refers to the kind of knowledge which "gives an account" (logos) of everything. Applied directly to the reasoning process, this was seen as a method of searching for transcendental truth, that is, metaphysics. In Plato's later dialogues (particularly The Sophist), dialectic is the name given to the study of forms, and appears to refer to a method of definition by "genus and species" which was later to be regarded as the scientific method of reasoning and was subsequently identified with logic. Aristotle used dialectic to refer to reasoning from premises that are probable, in the sense of being generally accepted, and distinguished it sharply from the method of science. Later, from rhetoric and dialectic, the Stoics formed the two branches of logic. In the Middle Ages dialectica was applied to logic alone, and retained that meaning until Kant used the term "Transcendental Dialectic" in his Critique of Pure Reason. Kant argued that in classical philosophy dialectic had been simply a term used to disguise inadequate reasoning, and he proposed to give the word over to the exposition of such sophistries. Kant's dialectic described the criticism which shows the mutually contradictory character of the principles of science when they are employed to determine objects beyond empirical observation, objects such as God, the soul, the world, etc. Kant asserted that the principles of science and metaphysics were ultimately irreconcilable. But such a view was not entertained by Hegel, who set out to refute Kant with a new theory of dialectic.

Dialectic was applied by Hegel to the pattern of thought itself. Broadly, Hegel argued that thought proceeds by contradiction and the reconciliation of contradiction through three phases -- thesis, antithesis, synthesis.[12] The first phase, thesis, is a point of initial stability; the second, antithesis, is a process of complete opposition to that stability which negates the thesis and separates from it; the third, synthesis, is a new unification which reconciles thesis with antithesis to create a new and higher plane of order. (Soll, p.138) These cycles, according to Hegel, were not simple mechanical recurrence which left the world unaltered; they were the very essence of process. Dialectic explained process as a living organism which operated according to inherent laws. The world was to be seen not as a collection of static objects, but as a complex of processes in which even those things which seemed immutable go through constant change. As opposed to the old logic which considered contradiction as constituting a defect in things, in Hegelian dialectic, contradiction was the positive element. Synthesis, Hegel claimed, did not result from a compromise between contraries, the classical via media, but from a crisis brought about by the accentuation of the contradiction, which, in course, is abolished and reintegrated in a higher unity. (Soll, p.141)

From the idea of natural process expressed as dialectic, Hegel reinterpreted the course of human history. There was a forward movement in history which could be explained as being the way in which the Absolute Idea or Spirit achieved progressive realization in the medium of the material world. All human society was a product and aspect of the primordial "Idea", the natural expression of which was reason. As Carlyle was to claim, Hegel saw this forward movement as something achieved by the "heroes" of life, men whose ideas and ambitions were always the antithesis of the prevailing

[12] Ivan Soll, An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics (Chicago: University Press, 1969), p.138.

order and who unconsciously were the medium of the realization of Spirit.[13] But Hegel's concept of the Absolute was still regarded by him as a manifestation of the Divine, and therefore a confirmation of Christian doctrine. The conflict of opposites could explain the process of an organic universe, but it could not account for the creation of that universe, for in order to do that Hegel still required the presence of a First Principle, and that for him remained the Christian God. (Wilson, p.192)

The manifestation of spirit as the Christian principle set out by Hegel was challenged by Feuerbach, who claimed that God was the product of man. To Feuerbach, man projects and alienates in God his own essential qualities. Hegel had thus inverted subject and attribute, for he had made the Idea the creative subject and man and the world its product, when in fact, it was the opposite which was the reality. As Engels makes clear in his essay on Feuerbach, it was this philosopher's critique of Hegel that provided the link between the dialectic of Hegel and the new materialism of Marx.[14]

Marx pursued Feuerbach's inversion to its logical conclusion. Subordinating the development of the spirit to the development of economic and social reality, Marx arrived at a new understanding of the nature of materialism. As opposed to the mechanical explanations of the universe postulated by thinkers of the Enlightenment, Marx presented a dynamic material universe. In advocating such a view of life Marx's view was not unique, for it was very much in accordance with emerging philosophical trends. Deterministic as the picture of the world given by Darwin's biology had been, such a view, nevertheless, suggested the intricacy of process, which although expressed as a "survival instinct", did focus on an energy engaged in realization.

[13] Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History (1940; rpt. London: Collins, 1960), p.144.

[14] Frederick Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy (London: M. Lawrence, 1934), p.16.

Marx argued that the starting point of all understanding must be from the observation of man's life-processes and not from how men imagine themselves to exist in a universe expressed metaphysically. It was man's actual way of life which determined spiritual reality, so understanding had to proceed from how men secured their necessities of life, their "modes of production".[15] The manner in which men obtained food, clothing, shelter and so on, determined how they actually saw the world and how they were progressively integrated into that world. It was man's manner of work -- his labour -- which played the mediator between him and the external world and was the manner whereby the two became related. Practical action was to Marx neither solely a determined end nor a spiritually directed end. Matter and mind were not separate entities, but were engaged in essential interaction.

It was on his conception of action as reality that Marx formed the idea of history as a dialectical process. He set out to demonstrate that the movement of history is linked to the development of the relations between the forces of production and social forces. Social relations, Marx believed, corresponded and were adapted to forces of production so that every important change in the latter necessarily entailed a change in society at large. In their continual development, the forces of production come up against the organization of society, which evolves at a slower rate, and sooner or later becomes an obstacle to the operation of these forces, so that society itself must be replaced by a new and better adapted structure.[16]

Like everything else in the universe, social and political structures were constantly changing and developing, seeking new forms of adaptation. In this process the state had historically been the place where private interests triumphed. This economic reality was, according to Marx, one which was constantly contrasted with the ideal state, a sphere of good or general interests, created, as

[15] Capital, (I, 26) in A Handbook of Marxism, ed. E Burns (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), pp.375-9.

[16] Maurice Cornforth, Historical Materialism, Vol. I of Dialectical Materialism (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1952), pp.104-5.

man had created God, by the exteriorization of the highest social qualities. But such a state was only an illusion of human equality. In order to put an end to the dichotomy of real and ideal and give the mass of humanity an effective existence, society, Marx urged, must be given a collective character. Social revolution would evolve as part of the historical process and would be carried out by the proletariat which, in liberating itself, would emancipate all of society, thereby establishing a new phase of order -- Communism. Social development was thus based by Marx on Hegel's dialectic. Society was composed of two opposing interests, expressed as the conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the conflict between the haves and the have-nots; bourgeoisie as the established order represented the thesis, while proletariat, in opposition to that order, was the antithesis; the antithetical element would act against the thesis thus effecting a new synthesis, the new order of collective existence.

Marx's dialectical materialism held to the idea that economic and class relations were the main determinant of social development and it could offer not only an explanation of economic, political and social evolution, but could explain spiritual evolution as well, for consciousness was "directly interwoven with the material activity".[17] The production of ideas and concepts arose from man's particular mode of work and was therefore "the language of actual life".[18] Consciousness was not the source of matter but its highest product, for the function of the mind was to create but not transform fundamental matter.

Such a view of consciousness implied that with the increasing complexity of life, new forms of thought would develop which would change man's concept of himself, and conversely, it suggested that man was enslaved only by living with a form of consciousness which

[17] German Ideology in A Handbook of Marxism, p.212.

[18] German Ideology, p.212.

denied him his fullest development.

While Marx claimed to have shown a direct relation between economic development and the modes of thought in which dialectic played the key role, he could not prove that dialectic was in any way fundamental law. His work setting out the principles of dialectic was never finished, and Engels's attempt to demonstrate that dialectic was the informing principle of scientific orientation, failed. However, what the concept did provide was a picture of social change within the historical process which sanctioned revolution as part of the natural order. As a symbol of revolt, dialectic organized the more complex ideas of Marx and Engels into an easily assimilated formula which was to become (and still is) the justification of extremes of action. But a symbol it has remained. Dialectic is not open to empirical verification and like all previous ways of imagining the organization of the universe, including traditional religious views, requires the principle of faith for its existence. Ultimately, there is no way of proving beyond any measure of doubt that either thought or historical change has occurred as a result of economic causes realized as class struggle, and therefore such a concept remains in essence mystical, even although it is justified in "scientific" terms. Like all symbols which enshrine beliefs and values, dialectic has its peculiar potency, and the positive side of that potency was that it allowed Marx to interpret the inequalities of class in a way which aroused men to want to change through direct action their social structure. Marx's ideal was to create a new order which, at least in principle, would provide opportunity for a more worthy direction in human affairs. Marx in removing the over-riding motive of self-interest which had been at the heart of the theories of Machiavelli and Hobbes, and replacing it with a non-religious altruism, gave expression to a new and universal social ideal which, in the hands of

his greatest disciple, Lenin, became the justification and realization of the proletarian revolution in Russia.

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Chapter Twelve

MacDiarmid's Dialectic and the Caledonian Antisyzygy

MacDiarmid's adoption of the principles of dialectical materialism was a gradual process extending over a number of years and was one which basically rejected the more dogmatic elements of Marxism in favour of the Hegelian aspects of the philosophy. Dialectical materialism marked for MacDiarmid another stage in his understanding of the evolution of consciousness and as such was readily equated by him with his earlier attempts to theorize on his aesthetic.

The fact that A Drunk Man was not an immediate and public success was a great blow to MacDiarmid, for he recognized that if the work was not understood and acclaimed then it could hardly be expected to effect the kind of change in Scottish culture that he had hoped it would. Writing to Ogilvie, MacDiarmid confided,

> I always suffer from reaction after putting out a book: and am ridiculously sensitive to what reviewers say - even when I know their incompetence and malice. I say to myself: what can reviewers be expected to make of a thing like The Drunk Man - and yet I am horribly vexed when they make nothing of it or something utterly stupid. I set out to give Scotland a poem, perfectly modern in psychology which could only be compared in the whole length of Scots literature with Tam O'Shanter and Dunbar's Seven Deidly Sins. And I felt that I had done it by the time I finished - despite all the faults and flaws of my work. (At the last moment I excised lyrics etc. which aggregated at least a third more than its published bulk)... the lack of interest in the book on the part of the public and the great majority of reviewers is chilling: and I am all the more glad to have a reassuring letter from yourself, and move forward again out of comparative dejection to the position that 'it is all right in its way, but will take a year or two in the nature of things to accumulate the reputation it deserves' (9 Dec., 1926).

Despite his dejection, MacDiarmid went on to tell Ogilvie that he had

already begun work on his next project -- Cencrastus. He explained to his old schoolteacher that he expected it would take much longer to complete this new work, for,

> ... it is much bigger than the Drunk Man in every way. It is complementary to it really. Cencrastus is the fundamental serpent, the underlying unifying principle of the cosmos. To circumjack is to encircle. To Circumjack Cencrastus - to square the circle, to box the compass etc. But where the Drunk Man is in one sense a reaction from the 'Kailyaird', Cencrastus transcends that altogether - the Scotsman gets rid of the thistle, 'the bur o' the world' and his spirit at last inherits its proper sphere. Psychologically it represents the resolution of the sadism and masochism, the synthesis of the various sets of antithesis I was posing in the Drunk Man. It will not depend on the contrasts of realism and metaphysics, bestiality and beauty, humour and madness - but more on a plane of pure beauty and pure music. It will be an attempt to move really mighty numbers. In the nature of things such an ambition cannot be hastily consummated. It will take infinite pains - but along these lines I am satisfied that, if I cannot altogether realise my dream, I can at least achieve something worth while, ideally complementary to the Drunk Man - positive where it is negative, optimistic where it is pessimistic, and constructive where it is destructive... (Ibid.).

To Circumjack Cencrastus was not published until 1930, that is, four years after A Drunk Man. It is indeed a much longer, but by no means superior work.

The central symbol of Cencrastus, "the fundamental serpent", is a continuation of that image from the early poem "The Sea Serpent", through its various representations in A Drunk Man, including its association with Ygdrasil. The image is also linked to MacDiarmid's growing interest in "The Gaelic Idea", a by-product of his association with Erskine of Marr, a new movement which was to bring together Gaelic and Lowland backgrounds into a single heritage, and for which,

the snake with its intertwining coils, and its recurrence in Celtic art and mythology, was a particularly appropriate symbol.[1] MacDiarmid's conception of the work in the letter to Ogilvie sounds promising, but the fact that he feels he can abandon "the contrasts of realism and metaphysics" for a "plane of pure beauty" suggests the central difficulty of the work.

Despite its presence in the fine opening of the poem,

> There is nae movement in the world like yours.
> You are as different frae a' thing else
> As water frae a book, fear frae the stars ...
> The licht that History sheds on anything
> Is naething to the licht you shed on it.
> Time's dourest riddles to solution slide
> Like Lautréamont's cormorant; and Man
> Shudders to see you slippin' into place ...
> The simple explanations that you gi'e
> O' age-lang mysteries are little liked
> Even by them wha best appreciate
> The soond advice you gied to Mither Eve,
> Or think they dae ... (C.P. I, p.181)

the snake symbol appears too infrequently to give the kind of thematic and structural unity which is achieved by the use of the thistle in A Drunk Man. The final result is that the work as a whole is disconnected, and while it has many oustanding passages, the kind of domestic realism offset by high metaphysical flights which is so much the strength of the earlier work, is replaced by long philosophical and discursive tracts which lack the variety and liveliness of his successes.

MacDiarmid realized that Cencrastus was a failure, and looking back on it in later years, he tried to outline, in a letter to a friend and poet, Helen B. Cruickshank, what some of the difficulties had been. He began by explaining the title,

> As to Cencrastus, all I can say is that Cencrastus, the Curly snake, is a Gaelic (or Scottish) version of the idea common to Indian and other mythologies that underlying Creation there is a great snake - and that its movements form the pattern of history... (Feb., 1939).[2]

[1] In 1927 Erskine of Marr started The Pictish Review which was to be the organ of the "Gaelic Idea". MacDiarmid was the main contributor and his articles deal with such things as introducing "the discipline of the Bardic colleges" into Scottish literature and to establishing a "Gaelic Commonwealth". The movement was short-lived and the periodical folded after one year.

[2] The C.M. Grieve/Helen B. Cruickshank Correspondence, Edinburgh University Library, Ms. 886.

Like the image of the thistle, the snake, MacDiarmid explained, is a symbol of unity which incorporates and represents within itself the actions of men and ideas through time and space; the snake represents the historical process. As a symbol of process, the snake also describes the movement of consciousness,

> In my poem that snake represents not only an attempt to glimpse the underlying pattern of human history but identifies with the evolution of human thought - the principle of change and the main factor in the revolutionary development of human consciousness, 'man's incredible variations', moving so intricately and swiftly that it is difficult to watch, and impossible to anticipate its next move. The poem as a whole therefore is a poem of Homage to Consciousness - a paean to Creative Thought (Ibid.).

Once again, the snake is the process out of which consciousness has evolved. But in his work, MacDiarmid wrote, the snake is also incorporated into the idea of Scottish culture,

> In so far as it is specifically a Scottish poem, and concerned in particular to glorify the Gaelic element in our heritage (which I believe underlies our Scottish life and history in much the same way that consciousness underlies and informs the whole world of man) the doctrine it is filled with is, to quote Count Keyserling, that,
>
> > 'the real goal of progress is on the one hand a total lived experience of the whole of the real, and on the other hand such a deeply rooted fixation in order that, thanks to it, man can by the function of comprehension and spiritual initiative working through it, make the entire universe his own';
>
> and of course, in my poem - I being a Scot - that fixation is the Scottish genius, or Scottish role in history. Or in other words the subject of my poem is World Consciousness which I believe to be the greatest function and destiny of Man - a historical mission of humanity in relation to the Cosmos in which we Scots can play our part only in so far as we have that sharp awareness of our own nature in which, as in a mirror, we can see natures other than our own (Ibid.).

According to the above, the true "genius" of the Scottish race, a genius which has its origins in the Gaelic side of its heritage and in which

mythological symbols such as that of the snake are shared with other cultures, is realized when the individual participates in the general cosmic order, through a kind of spiritual will, a "spiritual initiative". MacDiarmid would have it that the particularity of the Scottish place in history will come to fruition only when the individual consciously achieves his "own nature", which is simply a restatement of his earlier Nietzschean directive to "Become what you are". Such a process of willed action, he went on to relate, is what will establish a more universal consciousness,

> I believe that this pursuit of World Consciousness is the phase of mankind's development upon which we are now entering. Materially we have conquered the world; spiritually we have scarcely begun to do so. Our love must balance our knowledge - the Physical Sciences have so enormously outrun our sciences of ourselves as to create a perilous disequilibrium - the goal up to recently has been 'when man to man shall brithers be for a' that' - the Parliament of Man and the Federation of the World. But that is not enough. Our unique gift as human beings is the power to think ... it is only by a realization and acceptance of that that we can give our Love the necessary fullness and guidance (Ibid.).

The introduction of Love as an informing principle in the growth of consciousness, combined with the earlier reference to Keyserling, suggests the direction in which MacDiarmid is going, for he ends this letter by referring once again to the philosophy of Soloviev,

> In Russian religious thought (e.g. in Soloviev) man's destiny is through his consciousness to reconcile the lower orders of creation - animals, plants, minerals - to St. Sophia, the Wisdom of God, who is the female hypostasis of the Deity. My poem envisages that reconciliation (and insists upon the part Scotland should, can, and must play in that great task) in purely intellectual - i.e. non-mystical and non-religious terms; and from the point of view of this development of my own thought, it would be correct to say that the various aspects in which I have seen the Serpent, in addition to or alongside those aspects of it with which I dealt in the

poem, are,

1) The Caledonian Antisyzygy

2) The Dialectical Process

which are of course all one and the same thing (Ibid.).

Unity between the material and the spiritual is brought about when consciousness is actively extended into all creation, "animals, plants, minerals", as Soloviev had advocated. But MacDiarmid is stating here that this expansion of vision must be done in "non-mystical and non-religious terms", for universal order, he is claiming, can be apprehended in "purely intellectual" ways. This is, of course, a contradiction, for what he is describing is a mystical transcendence which cannot be explained in intellectual terms, and the way in which MacDiarmid uses Soloviev's ideas to support his view suggests the limitations of MacDiarmid's understanding of what it is he is advocating. The fact that MacDiarmid can see both the "Caledonian Antisyzygy" and the "Dialectical Process" as essentially the same as the ideas he was attempting to express through the snake symbol in Cencrastus, suggests that both are offering him a means of reconciling his need to see things in an intellectual light with his opposite tendency to celebrate a mystical apprehension of reality. Cencrastus was

> ... an attempt to box the compass - to envisage as far as one possibly can all the complex strivings and developments of human thought, and then, having done that, attempt to anticipate the upshot of the whole business (i.e. to 'circumjack' - or enclose - the Serpent) by using those attributes of the poetic faculty which transcend rational process and carry one into the realm of gnomic utterance and prophecy (Ibid.)

That is, the work was meant to achieve a synthesis between the intellectual and the visionary, but, stated MacDiarmid, Cencrastus "like its theme, fell ill to circumjack" and he dismissed the work as "crude" and "immature" (Ibid.).

The lack of cohesiveness evident in Cencrastus is symptomatic of MacDiarmid's state of life in the late twenties and early thirties. After the failure of the National Party of Scotland in the 1929 General Election, MacDiarmid on being offered by Compton MacKenzie a job as editor of Vox, a magazine to be dedicated to the new broadcasting, he moved with his family to London. Vox was not successful and neither were any of the other editing and publishing ventures MacDiarmid became involved in in this period. His marriage to Peggy Skinner broke up and he separated from her and the children. Caught in the Depression he was unable to find work to support himself and his literary efforts failed to bring the success he had hoped would be his in London. The size of both his personal difficulties and the larger economic crisis found him, to a large degree, severing his former commitment to the Scots vernacular movement and its accompanying politics.

In 1931 the poet William Soutar wrote to MacDiarmid to explain his plan for reviving Scots through the speech of children, through "bairn rhymes", and while MacDiarmid was prepared to support and encourage Soutar in his efforts, he made it clear that the direction of his own interest in Scots had always been much more intellectual and he was not therefore prepared to lead any such revival as Soutar proposed. He replied to Soutar's letter in the following terms,

> I agree that there is a very great deal in what you say but I think you are confusing two things - in both of which I am keenly interested, but on very different planes. Any revival of Scots among the people at large, in the schools, etc. has my strong support and I think that a re-vaccination of the children with it much as you suggest an excellent idea - but when I write or speak about a revival of Scots I am usually not thinking about that but about its effective resumption into literary practice and adaptation to the most modern expressive requirements. This latter is not necessarily related to - let alone dependent upon - the former at all. If great poetry is written in any language it does not matter a hoot whether nobody can read it

> except the man who wrote it; that does not affect its qualities; and I am not prepared to concede that the artist should be concerned with his audience or that art must subserve any social or other purpose in its own development. So far as I am personally concerned I am quite clear that I am not now nor likely to become - whatever potentialities I may have had in the past - the man to write these bairn-rhymes or re-popularise Scots (10 March, 1931).[3]

While MacDiarmid is on the defensive here, he is also concerned with insisting upon his integrity as an artist and his right to allow his poetry to develop outside of political or social contingencies, an important point considering that he had even then begun to write overtly Communist poetry. In another letter to Soutar, written a year later when Soutar was about to publish his work in the vernacular, Seeds in the Wind, and had asked for MacDiarmid's opinion of it, MacDiarmid answered,

> I appreciate its merits ... but my own poetic is so radically different and my feeling about Scots so peculiar that I am probably not the best but the worst man to pass judgement on it. I do feel, I am afraid, that on the whole I have been to Scots a thoroughly bad influence on you and others and that my own practice in regard to the synthetic business justifies in my case alone - so far - what in other cases simply clutters up the verse with unvivified and useless words (26 Feb., 1932).[4]

The view expressed here is a long way removed from the fiery "causeries" of S.C. which had urged poets to turn to dialect for authentic expression in their work. But ten years had passed since writing those editorials and MacDiarmid must have been all too acutely aware that the renaissance he had promised had simply not materialized. True, there had been a literary movement. There was more activity in literature, particularly in the vernacular, in the twenties in Scotland than had taken place for a long time. But placed beside the achievements of that other Celtic movement -- the Irish Renaissance -- which not only produced writers of

[3]The Letters of William Soutar, National Library of Scotland, Ms. 8515.

[4]The Letters of William Soutar, Ms. 8517.

the stature of Yeats, Synge, Joyce and O'Casey, but did win political independence, and compared to the model MacDiarmid had consistently held up and paralleled with Scotland -- Russia -- the Scottish Renaissance was a spluttering candle to a raging fire. In fact, what the Scots movement had amounted to was an attempt at a self-fulfilling prophecy, led by one man of oustanding intellectual and creative ability -- MacDiarmid himself.

By the thirties, the task of reviving Scots as a literary language was no longer the central concern of MacDiarmid's work and the ensuing shift of linguistic emphasis was accompanied by a change in political gears, with MacDiarmid becoming a part of the tide of political and intellectual Communism. MacDiarmid began writing poetry with a distinct Communist outlook and was very much the forerunner of those socialist poets who were to become known as the "Thirties Generation".[5] C. Day Lewis, himself one of the Thirties group, acknowledged that MacDiarmid's work, distinct and original as it was, acted as a stimulus to that movement. He wrote,

> Communism did not begin to affect British Poetry till some fifteen years after the October Revolution. In 1931 'Hugh MacDiarmid' published his 'First Hymn to Lenin'. Most of his poetry is written in Scots vernacular, which may account for the neglect in England of such admirable stuff as his earlier 'A Drunk Man' and 'To Circumjack Cencrastus'. In these works the influence of Eliot is apparent, but there is also a bluntness, a harshness, and a mixture of metaphysical ecstasy and mundane uncouth wildness, which are peculiarly national. The 'First Hymn to Lenin' shows the drunk man sober, the high-flying metaphysician descended to a solid, materialist earth.... In 'The Seamless Garment', one of MacDiarmid's best poems, we find ... a calm and reasoned certainty that is most impressive.... The 'First Hymn to Lenin' was followed by a rush of poetry sympathetic to Communism or influenced by it ... (A Hope for Poetry (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934), pp.50-3.

MacDiarmid expressed a great deal of contempt for the political poetry of the "Thirties Generation", because he detected in their work an

[5] Poetry of the Thirties, ed. Robin Skelton, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.14. The "Thirties Generation" is Skelton's name for poets writing socialist work in that decade, but he mistakenly confines his selection to those born between 1904-1916, so that the main figures of this movement are identified as Auden, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice; MacDiarmid is excluded and his work does not even receive a mention.

essentially authoritarian pose and saw their attempts to write about their commitment to communist ideals as totally unconvincing.[6] MacDiarmid's socialist poetry is so much more authentic because he does speak out of a working class background and therefore could talk directly about common experience in a way which was quite impossible for these poets from a privileged class to do. "The Seamless Garment" illustrates some of the strengths MacDiarmid knew were lacking in the works of others. The tone of the poem is conversational, but is a monologue spoken to a weaver working in a mill in MacDiarmid's birthplace, Langholm,

> You are a cousin of mine
> Here in the mill.
> Its queer that born in the Langholm
> It's no' until
> Just noo I see what it means
> To work in the mill like my freen's.
>
> I was tryin' to say something
> In a recent poem
> Aboot Lenin. You've read a guid lot
> In the news - but ken the less o'm?
> Look, Wullie, here is his secret noo
> In a way I can share it wi' you.
>
> His secret and the secret o' a'
> That's worth ocht.
> The shuttles fleein' owre quick for my een
> Prompt the thocht,
> And the coordination atween
> Weaver and machine ...

The speaker goes on to explain to his cousin weaver the principles of Lenin's politics associating that with the action of the loom and his own work, poetry, thus suggesting that a poet like Rilke, a political leader like Lenin and the weaver are all engaged in the same process,

[6] L.P., p.169. MacDiarmid wrote, " ... this English 'Left' literature [is] the natural phenomena of a Leftism in an oppressor-country which, no matter under which pretence of liberalism or social democracy, is determined to hang on to its Ascendance ... and the more it is itself obliged to pretend to progressive sentiments it is far from really holding, or indeed genuinely entertaining at all.... This pretence of Socialist belief ... is an impudent bluff".

Lenin was like that wi' workin' class life,
   At hame wi't a'.
His fause movements couldna been fewer,
   The best weaver Earth ever saw.
A' he'd do to dae wi' moved intact
   Clean, clear and exact.

A poet like Rilke did the same
   In a different sphere,
Made a single reality - a' a'e oo' -
   O' his love and pity and fear;
A seamless garment o' music and thought
But you're owre thrang wi' puirer to tak tent o't.

What's life or God or what you may ca't
   But something at ane like this?
Can you divide yoursel' frae your breath
   Or - if you say yes -
Frae your mind that as in the case
O' the loom keeps that in its place? ...

The poem ends with a plea for the weaver to follow the lead of men like Lenin and Rilke and "live to the full", by making of his own life a "seamless garment", by creating in himself something which will not only equal what the loom can produce, but be of a piece with humanity's higher ideals, even as the poet sees his work as part of the weaving process,

Hundred to the inch the threids lie in,
   Like men in a communist cell,
There's a play o' licht frae the factory windas.
   Could you no' mak' mair yoursel'?
Mony a loom mair alive than the weaver seems
For the sun's still nearer than Rilke's dreams....

And as for me in my fricative work
   I ken fu' weel
Sic an integrity's what I maun ha'e,
   Indivisible, real,
Woven owre close for the point o' a pin
   Onywhere to win in. (C.P. I, pp.311-14)

The language of "A Seamless Garment" shows a shift in emphasis from the dense Scots of MacDiarmid's earlier work, to something which is much more readily identifiable with English, and such a change suggests

that what MacDiarmid was trying to do was to appeal to a wider audience. It was during the period of writing his socialist poetry that MacDiarmid first began to describe his work as being in the "dialectic" and while the adoption of this term suggests the deliberate association with the principles of Marx's materialism, on analysis, MacDiarmid's "dialectic" is seen to have more traditional origins.

In a surviving fragment of a letter to Frances George Scott, probably written around 1941, MacDiarmid set out one of his clearest statements about the nature of his attraction to Marx's philosophy. He begins by quoting from Marx's condemnation of religion in Gesamtausgabe (I, 6, p.278),

> 'The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of classical days; they glorified mediaeval serfdom; and, when necessary, understand how to defend the oppression of the proletariat. The social principles of Christianity proclaim the necessity for the existence of a ruling class and an oppressed class, and remain content with the pious wish that the former will deal charitably with the latter. The social principles of Christianity assume that there will be a consistorial compensation in heaven for all the infamies committed on earth, and therewith justify the continuance of these infamies....[7]

MacDiarmid is very critical of Marx's "rhetoric" here and states that there is "a certain failure to appreciate the positive accomplishments of the Christian heretical movements" and a lack of understanding of principles which had taken "18 centuries to develop" (Ibid.). But he sees that what Marx is concerned to do is "to defend human personality - its dignity and independence - against vulgar materialistic views, on the one hand, and authoritarian spiritualistic views, on the other" (Ibid.). Consistent with what MacDiarmid had found in Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Soloviev, what he locates in Marx is the philosopher's recognition of the life process as a state of striving.

[7]The C.M. Grieve/F.G. Scott Correspondence, Edinburgh University Library, Ms. 887. The correspondence is incomplete because Scott destroyed a great number of the letters after a quarrel with MacDiarmid. Internal references to the war and other current events suggest the date of the above fragment.

Marx, states MacDiarmid, recognized that "man is not born with a 'soul' or 'human personality'. He achieves it" (Ibid.) Such a concept of personality is in direct contrast, writes MacDiarmid, to the views of religious apologists like Jacques Maritain, for whom "'personality' ... can exist independently of physical, biological, historical and cultural conditions", a position MacDiarmid dismisses as "bad psychology and still worse metaphysics" (Ibid.) Marx had identified the interconnections between the individual and social and historical processes more acutely than anyone before him, MacDiarmid argues, and what Marx had been concerned to do was "to help to bring into existence, the social, cultural, and educational conditions under which all men and women may develop sympeant human personalities" (Ibid.).

The argument of the foregoing is related in the letter to ideas MacDiarmid is putting forward about the nature of authenticity in poetry and in relation to which he quotes, not from Marx, but from one of Matthew Arnold's letters to Arthur Clough, in which Arnold had written, "'The good feature in all your poems is the sincerity that is evident in them: which always produces a powerful effect on the reader - and which most people with the best intentions lose totally when they sit down to write. The spectacle of a writer striving evidently to get breast to breast with reality is always invigorating" (Ibid.).[8] MacDiarmid also indicates that this kind of authenticity in poetry will be the mark of a poetry which has "an immense task to perform", a poetry which must be "very plain, direct, and severe; and ... must not lose itself in parts and episodes and ornamental work, but must press forwards for the whole!" (Ibid). This definition of a poetry which will express the ideals of Communism is again picked up by MacDiarmid in the introduction to John Singer's poems, The Fury of the Living (1942), and, as before, he quotes from Arnold's letters, this time referring specifically to a poetry of the

[8]The letter referred to here is that of 20 July, 1848? in The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. H.F. Lowry, (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p.86.

"dialectic",

> In one of his letters to Clough, Arnold ... predicted that the poetry of the future, the poetry which really proves capable of discharging the great tasks looming up in the modern world, would be bare, spare, devoid of ornamentation and all unnecessary verbalism, direct, stripped for battle, sinewy and strenuous. In a word, that the poetry would be in the dialectic, that it would stand and fall by the intellectual level taken by the poet and the power shown by him in conceiving and working out his "plots" or "arguments"....

MacDiarmid's understanding of "dialectic" thus owed more to traditional literary sources than the philosophy of Marx, although, of course, he was making connections between the two by insisting that all that really counted in poetry or politics was authenticity and integrity, qualities which he had insisted upon from the earliest days of the vernacular revival.

Where the concept of dialectic was most useful to MacDiarmid was in helping him to work out a theory which would justify his new poetry, and, at a time of what was to be acute crisis in his life, find a strength in the "plain, direct, and severe".

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PART FOUR: ON WHALSAY

Chapter Thirteen

New Channels: Doughty and Davidson

By 1933 MacDiarmid's situation in London had become desperate and when he was offered a rent-free house on the remote island of Whalsey in Shetland by a physician friend, Dr. David Orr, he accepted. In London MacDiarmid had met and married his second wife, Valda Trevlyn, and with her and his young son he returned to Scotland. When he arrived on Whalsay in the spring of 1933, MacDiarmid's health was so poor that one Scottish newspaper had already prepared his obituary.[1] Acutely ill, aware that he was being regarded as a failure, and experiencing at first hand the worst of the Depression, the best that he, like so many others of that decade could hope for, was simply to survive until the tide turned.

Initially, MacDiarmid felt his isolation in Shetland acutely and saw himself as having been ostracized by his former political and literary allies. But gradually, as his old friends contacted him, and as his own health began to improve, he started to find attractions in island life. In reply to a letter from the author Neil Gunn, he wrote,

> I had felt we had got completely - perhaps irrevocably - out of touch with each other, as, in certain respects and these incomparably the most vital to me I am out of touch with everybody else in Scotland: and, indeed cannot even yet move about with any confidence or produce effective work, in this new world of my spirit. But I am gradually finding myself - a new self. That is why I am here - I have been a fortnight. I am rowing about on lonely waters; lying brooding in uninhabited islands; seeing no newspapers and in other ways cutting myself completely away from civilised life (19 May, 1933).[2]

[1] David Orr, "MacDiarmid the Man" in Jabberwock, Vol. 5, 1958, pp.14-16. Orr recalls that MacDiarmid's obituary had been prepared by an editor who had consistently refused to publish any of MacDiarmid's work, yet eulogized him in the obituary. A proof of the notice came MacDiarmid's way and he replied in "measured terms finishing with 'Yours in contempt, H. MacD'".

[2] The Neil Gunn Papers, National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209, Box 17.

There is here the suggestion of a self-imposed isolation on the part of MacDiarmid and for a man who had always been accustomed to the bustle of public life and stimulating companionship, this new estrangement must have been hard indeed. Fortunately, MacDiarmid's bouts of self-pity were short-lived and even on Whalsay it was only a short time before he was once again to recover some of his old ebullience.

The austerity and isolation had some kind of therapeutic effect on MacDiarmid, lifting him out of an introspective pessimism and restoring his confidence. He began to participate in the life of the island, going out in the herring boats with the local fishermen, actively exploring the rocky terrain of Whalsay and the neighbouring islands, and showing great interest in Norn, the old language of Shetland. By July of the same year, writing to William Soutar, MacDiarmid was able to report that,

> These almost uninhabited islands and lonely seas suit me splendidly; and I'm glad to be away from political movements, newspapers, and all the rest of it for a while. Besides I have a heavy tale of work in hand for which this is an ideal atmosphere. In the interstices of leading the simple life I have been able already to write more poetry than all my previously published stuff put together ... most of the stuff consists of poems too long for periodicals and ... represents in several cases valuable new departures (5 July, 1933).[3]

Much of the poetry MacDiarmid was producing dealt with his response to his new surroundings and to the way of life of the island people. His "Shetland Lyrics" of this period contain some of his finest poetry, much of it in Scots. But, as MacDiarmid makes clear to Soutar, he had already embarked on a new line of development. He goes on to explain to Soutar that he has put some of this new work together and plans to publish a new anthology with the title, Stony Limits and Other Poems. The new volume, MacDiarmid wrote, would contain,

[3]The Letters of William Soutar, National Library of Scotland, Ms. 8521.

over fifty poems,

> ... nine or ten of which are as long as 'Tam of the Wilds' which I propose to include because it is unlike most of the others in theme, tone and technique and so helps to give the impression of variety which is one of the things I want. But most of the others are 'difficult' - indeed the title poem, and another long one, are in synthetic English - not Scots.

The "long poem" MacDiarmid refers to seems likely to have been On a Raised Beach, but it was not until February of 1934 that he was to refer to it by its title. Commenting once again on the proposed publication of Stony Limits, MacDiarmid wrote,

> Some of these poems, I think, show me approaching a solution of the problems which, as you say, I have been confronting ... I think the best is a very long poem which has not appeared anywhere before 'On a Raised Beach' (20 Feb., 1934).[4]

MacDiarmid obviously attached a great deal of importance to this work and there is a strong sense that it represented some kind of resolution to him. What is clear is that the language of this poem is significantly different from his earlier work and is written in a compound language he had described as "synthetic English".

MacDiarmid's own experiments in dialect which had involved him in bringing together words from various regions into a poetry which gave individual idiom a broader context and significance, had led him to be interested in similar attempts in other languages. He had been greatly attracted by the innovations in modern Russian poetry, but he was also keen on the work of English dialect poets like William Barnes, a poet who MacDiarmid maintained had been shamefully neglected and who should have been to the English what Burns was to the Scots. Similar treatment, he felt, had been accorded to an even more important English writer than Barnes, Charles Montagu Doughty (1843-1926). MacDiarmid had been reading Doughty as early as 1904[5] and felt that he offered the

[4] The Letters of William Soutar, Ms. 8522.

[5] Personal interview with MacDiarmid, 28 August, 1977.

greatest potential for new linguistic development in English. In a review for N.A. written in response to Edwin Muir's assertion that Edith Sitwell's work belonged to the great "order of poetry", MacDiarmid wrote that Doughty was a greater "genius" whose "experimentalism" made him a "greater poet than all the Sitwells put together" ("Doughty and the Sitwells", N.A. 31 March, 1927, p.262).

MacDiarmid's interest in Doughty was both linguistic and spiritual, for he saw the Victorian as a man of extraordinary courage, endurance and mental strength. In the 1870's Doughty, a geologist, writer and explorer, had gone alone into the Arabian desert, initially to record the inscriptions on the stone monuments at Medain Salih, a stop on the pilgrimage route to Mecca, but had stayed on in the desert, living in the towns and travelling with the nomads, keeping reports of the geography of the place, and recording the customs, habits and language of the natives.[6] Doughty published his observations in Travels in Arabia Deserta (1888), a work in which he pledged to tell of "the haps that befell me ... that which I saw with my eyes, and heard with my ears and thought in my heart, neither more nor less" (I, p.95).[7]

A very strong part of Doughty's attraction to the desert lay in the fact that in this Biblical landscape he felt himself close to the roots of early Christianity. The very speech of the people, Doughty felt, referred back "to the days of the nomad Hebrew Patriarchs", and he believed that by becoming familiar with the mode of life of the desert people he would be "the better able to read the bulk of the Old Testament books, with that further insight and understanding, which comes of a living experience" (I, p.52).

[6]The main sources of biographical information are: Barker Fairley, Charles M. Doughty: A Critical Study (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927); D.G. Hogarth, The Life of Charles M. Doughty (London: Oxford University Press, 1928); Anne Treneer, Charles M. Doughty: A Study of his Prose and Verse (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935).

[7]Op. cit., 2 Vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1888). T.E. Lawrence who wrote the preface to the 1921 edition, regarded this work as a great classic and points out that it was used as a "military textbook" during the First World War. Richard Burton, the other Arabian explorer, however, claimed that Doughty had made numerous errors in his record of Arabian culture and language.

In the desert, like Christ in the wilderness, Doughty went through a period of acute spiritual torment. His Christianity was seriously challenged in a landscape which he felt conspired to reduce man to insignificance and which put the question of whether to despair or endure into sharp focus. Faced with a desolate natural world, Doughty experienced an Existential confrontation with life seen as nothing but unremitting matter. He wrote,

> We look out from every height, upon the Harra, over an iron desolation; what uncouth blackness and lifeless cumber of vulcanic matter! an hard-set face of nature... and rusty horror of unformed matter. What lonely life would not feel constraint of heart to trespass here! the barren heaven, the nightmare soil! where should he look for comfort? - There is a startled conscience within a man of his mesquin being, and profane, in presence of the divine stature of the elemental world! this lion-like sleep of cosmogonic forces, in which is swallowed up the gnat of the soul within him, - that short motion and parasitical usurpation which is the weak accident of life in matter (I, p.162).

The intensity of Doughty's spiritual struggle was to be recalled by MacDiarmid in On a Raised Beach where he quotes Doughty directly, the "seeing of a hungry man", which was the way in which Doughty described the clarity of vision which the desert landscape thrust upon him.

In keeping with recording the landscape of antiquity, Doughty used a literary style which divorced itself from contemporary Victorian prose. Arabia Deserta is written in a blend of Chaucerian and Spenserian English mixed with Biblical allusions and Arabic vernacular expressions. Like Hopkins, Doughty was greatly interested in etymology and in Anglo-Saxon, which he had studied at Oxford. Arabic speech reminded Doughty of Old English, for he observed that,

> The Red Sea they call simply, 'The Sea, the Salt Sea':- Zeyd upon a time answered me, when I asked the sea's name, Bahr eth Thellam, 'Sea of the glooming (West).' - In like manner our Saxon king, Alfred, in his book of Geography: 'Ireland is dim, where the sun goeth on settle' (II, p.27).

Because of its amalgam of linguistic expressions and archaisms, Doughty's prose seems remote from everyday speech and makes his work difficult to read with any sense of immediacy. The work has never received great public acclaim, but there are many who regard it as a great work of English literature.[8]

When Doughty returned from Arabia, he went on to write his major work, a six volume epic entitled, The Dawn in Britain (1906), a work which again uses archaic diction as well as alliteration and assonance. The epic deals with the conflict between the ancient Celts and Romans, a conflict which will end in the triumph of Christianity, the truth and ideals of which it is Doughty's purpose to present afresh. The poem opens with the following lines,

> I chant new day-spring, in the Muses' Isles,
> Of Christ's eternal kingdom. Men of the East,
> Of hew and raiment strange, and uncouth speech,
> Behold, in storm-beat ship, cast nigh our Land!
> New Light is risen upon the World, from whence
> The dawn doth rise. In Canaan of the East,
> These days, was heard, of men, as Voice divine;
> Which in Thy mouth, Jesua, our Prince of Peace! (I, p.3)

The "Dawn" is the beginning of Christian civilization, an order based on the spiritual strength of love, which is secured for man by Christ's death, "His spirit, on heathen Rome's reproachful rood,/Breathed forth, for infinite, infinite, love of souls". The work as a whole is another example of the synthesis of Pagan and Christian, the marriage of the flesh and the spirit, which MacDiarmid was to return to again and again.

Doughty's poetry is imitated in the title poem of Stony Limits, which is also dedicated to the older man,

> Under no hanging heaven-rooted tree,
> Though full of mammuk's nests,
> Bone of old Britain we bury thee
> But heeding your unspoken hests

[8]Contemporary reaction to the work was generally unfavourable. Hopkins, for example, regarded Doughty's language as a retreat into antiquity. Doughty's style, wrote Hopkins, is an "affectation" in "obsolete English" and he claimed that in Doughty's work "there is no anguish" (Letters to Bridges, pp.283-4). Hopkins did not live to read Doughty's major poetry, even so, his dismissal of Doughty's prose as lacking real feeling is, I feel, a misinterpretation of Doughty's purpose. Doughty seems to distance deliberately his private emotion in order to make it more of a public statement of feeling.

Naught coeval with the Earth
And indispensable till its end
With what whom you despised may deem the dearth
Of your last resting-place dare blend.
Where nature is content with little so are you
So be it the little to which all else is due.

From this tribute to the language and spirit of Doughty, MacDiarmid moves on to another facet of Doughty's work which interested him greatly, that is, Doughty's use of scientific language in his creative works. Doughty incorporated geological terminology into his descriptions of the desert landscape and this too MacDiarmid imitates,

I belong to a different country than yours
And none of my travels have been in the same lands
Save where Arzachel or Langrenus allures
Such spirits as ours, and the Straight Wall stands,
But crossing shear planes extruded in long lines of ridges,
Torsion cylinders, crater rings, and circular seas
And ultra-basic xenoliths that make men look midges
Belong to my quarter as well, and with ease
I too can work in bright green and all the curious interference
Colours that under crossed nicols have a mottled appearance. (C.P.I, pp 419-21)

Included in the above, is a reference to the landscape of the moon, "where Arzachel or Langrenus allures ... and the Straight Wall stands". Drawing once again on his interest in astronomy, MacDiarmid knows he is referring to a landscape with which few are familiar, it is a "spectacle not one man in ten million knows", yet, it is exactly this ability to incorporate the new into his work which MacDiarmid admires in Doughty, and which he himself adopts, trying to make scientific knowledge part of the substance of the poem itself.

To MacDiarmid, Doughty was a "modern" in so far as what he had been attempting to do was to create a potent, more universal, English in which different periods and types of language were reworked into a new whole. Doughty had been concerned to present scientific fact in his poetry as objective and verifiable truth, and such a method, MacDiarmid felt, might possibly cut across old human boundaries. It was a language

which could prove to be the foundation of a new universality and as such would herald a classless human community because such a common use of language would indicate more similarities than differences between individual men and nations, and it was in this sense that MacDiarmid could describe the ultra-conservative Doughty as a prophet of Communism.

In his essay, "Charles Doughty and the Need for Heroic Poetry", MacDiarmid reviewed two works on Doughty, one by his friend Barker Fairley, Charles M. Doughty: A Critical Study, and the other by Anne Treneer, Charles M. Doughty: A Study of his Prose and Verse. MacDiarmid claimed that the majority of reviewers of these works had generally misunderstood Doughty and were not competent to judge his achievement. He wrote,

> The general rejection of Doughty by ... English reviewers is only a ridiculous belated insistence on a poetic diction - on the employment of a certain English and not any other. It is the same 'quaint survival' of an idea that dismisses my 'synthetic English' experiments in 'Stony Limits' as 'unfortunate', that denies, not only the urgent and inescapable necessity of the poetic use of the full range of modern scientific terminology, but the experience in linguistics of James Joyce, and Ezra Pound's use as a language of multifarious reference to all periods of history and all phases of human activity.[9]

Here, MacDiarmid is drawing a parallel between reaction to Doughty and response to his own work, which as the above suggests, was not well received, but he does go on in the essay to enumerate the qualities which he feels make Doughty's work unique. Doughty's language was not, to MacDiarmid, a simple and mechanical grafting of forms, but was more a means of providing an understanding of the world in its actuality. The language Doughty had fashioned was based on an accuracy of source and usage which had as its end the fusion of cultural differences and the continuity of past and present, in

[9] The Modern Scot (1936). Reprinted in S.E., pp.75-85, which is the reference used here.

the same way that Joyce and Pound had attempted to build cultural bridges through linguistic synthesis. What Doughty had been concerned to do was to strip off the superficial layers of language and restore to words some of their antique vigour, while, at the same time, insisting that the language of science find a place within poetry itself.

In committing himself to such an effort, MacDiarmid recognized that Doughty belonged to a stream of poets who had equated cultural and linguistic decay, all of whom had gone back to spoken and antique forms. In the opening of In Memoriam James Joyce, MacDiarmid wrote,

> Davidson, too, with his angry cry
> 'Our language is too worn, too much abused,
> Jaded and overspurred, wind-broken, lame, -
> The hackneyed roadster every bagman mounts';
>
> .....
>
> And on to Doughty and Hopkins ...
> Who go back to Langland's homely Anglo-Saxon verse;
> Doughty, by far the greatest of them all,
> Infinite in his awareness and charity,
> Harbinger of the epical age of Communism ... (C.P. II, p.740)

MacDiarmid would suggest that what Doughty, Davidson and Hopkins had been concerned to do was, by turning back to common speech, restore to language its capacity to express a sense of shared, communal values. To Doughty and Hopkins, those values were the ideals of Christianity, but to Davidson language had to break with the doctrines of religion and seek a new truth by confronting the facts of material reality.

As part of the aesthetic movement of the nineties, John Davidson (1857-1909) tried to introduce a new breadth into his poetry by drawing on a wide range of subject matter. "Poetry", wrote Davidson, "is the product of originality, of a first-hand experience and observation of life, of a direct communion with men and women, with the seasons of the year, with day and night".[10] His work of that period has been described as "Poetic Esperanto", for he

[10] "The Criticism of Poetry" in The Man Forbid and other Essays (Boston: Ball Publishing Co., 1910), pp.65-71.

freely experimented with idiom and style.[11] Seeking to express himself in a voice free of the cliché he associated with the decay of his civilization, Davidson wrote several pieces in colloquial speech, including the poem much admired by Eliot, "Thirty Bob a Week",

> I couldn't touch a stop and turn a screw,
> And set the blooming world a-work for me,
> Like such as cut their teeth - I hope, like you -
> On the handle of a skeleton gold key;
> I cut mine on a leek, which I eat it every week:
> I'm a clerk at thirty bob as you can see.
>
> But I don't allow it's luck and all a toss;
> There's no such thing as being starred and crossed;
> It's just the power of some to be a boss,
> And the bally power of others to be bossed:
> I face the music, sir; you bet I ain't a cur;
> Strike me lucky if I don't believe I'm lost! ...[12]

Davidson, like Hopkins and Doughty, used alliteration and assonance to great poetic effect, creating fine metrical pieces like "The Runnable Stag",

> When the pods went pop on the broom, green broom,
> And apples began to be golden-skinned,
> We harboured a stag in the Priory coomb,
> And we feathered his trail up-wind, up-wind,
> We feathered his trail up wind -
> A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,
> A runnable stag, a kingly crop,
> Brow, bay and tray and three on top,
> A stag, a runnable stag ... (Poems, I, pp.159-61)

Incorporating slang, Scotticisms, archaisms and recondite words into his language, Davidson's early poetry also used traditional forms like the ballad and his famous Fleet Street Eclogues, to contain this innovatory style.

In his later work, however, Davidson sought a spare and direct language more suited to the exposition of his philosophical materialism. Davidson saw increasingly that poetry had to be more than the "observation of life", and believed that in a time of social chaos the poet's task

[11] J.B. Townsend, John Davidson: Poet of Armageddon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p.223.

[12] The Poems of John Davidson, ed. Andrew Turnbull (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), I, p.63.

was to create new paths of thought and conduct. Accordingly, Davidson defined the role of the poet as that of prophet. Like Carlyle, Davidson believed that because the poet held the deepest intuitions about life his stance had to be that of the isolated hero. In his role as the transformer of reality, the poet must be prepared to cut himself loose from the orthodoxies of life and steer a course of defiant self-reliance. As Nietzsche advocated, so Davidson believed, that it was the assertion of individual will that made for the fullest possible self-realization. Great poetry was to Davidson, "the affirmation of the will to live, the affirmation of the will to power".[13] Like Nietzsche, Davidson utterly rejected the Christian God and saw the death of God as fundamental to a world which would regain purpose only when it gave full recognition to its material origins, for from such understanding man would cease to look for reward in an afterlife and choose instead to direct his own destiny.

The ideal of self-reliance which is so strong in Davidson's work can be attributed in part to the social values of his day. Both Carlyle and Arnold stressed the need for a strong individualism, and Davidson was in a sense simply stretching this ideal to its limits in demanding that man be seen as capable of an intensity of faith in his own abilities and promise.[14] Davidson's ideas were however unattenuated

[13]The influence of Nietzsche on Davidson is much debated. Davidson certainly translated Nietzsche from the French and used that as an unacknowledged source of ideas, but David Thatcher (Nietzsche in England) states that all that Nietzsche's ideas did for Davidson was confirm what was already there, for he demonstrates that the Nietzschean ideas are present in Davidson's earliest work. Thatcher concludes, "it was a pity ... that so few believed his [Davidson's] frequent denials of discipleship, or even questioned the basis on which they stood" (p.91). Townsend, in his study, arrives at the same conclusion. (See pps.475-82).

[14]Townsend, p.223.

by the classical humanist ideals of his predecessors and he voiced a new creed that emphasized endurance and a strength of mind capable of accepting the world in all its limitations.

The assertion of will through poetic intuition was not to Davidson a transcendental process, for such an understanding of poetry was to recognize a division between spirit and matter. Davidson believed there was no such division, and, like the early atomists, he claimed that the universe was first and foremost material,

> ... everything is constantly changing and becoming and returning to its first condition in a perpetual round of evolution and devolution; and this eternal tide of Matter, this restless ebb and flow, I call Immortality.[15]

In this material world man was matter's final triumph,

> Man is matter; mind and soul are material forces; there is no spiritual world as distinct from the material world; all psychical phenomena are material phenomena, the result of the operation of material forces; hence, I say again, the imagination of man, being a complex of material forces, cannot live in a metaphysical idea or an acknowledged myth, but makes its Heaven and Hell concrete, and itself immortal soul.[16]

According to Davidson, there was no need for metaphysical systems. All philosophies and theories which claimed to explain the nature of the spiritual world were simply metaphors for matter,

> I perceive the identity of Spinoza's God, Hegel's Absolute... Nietzsche's will to power. These all embracing categories are titles which Man in his madness has conferred on Matter.[17]

While Davidson claimed there was no ultimate moral order, man was immortal in so far as he was part of an "eternal tide of matter". The substance of man, even although it degenerated and decayed at death, was

[15] The Theatrocrat (London: Grant Richards, 1905), pp.25-6.
[16] The Theatrocrat, pp.35-6.
[17] A Rosary (London: Grant Richards, 1903), p.87.

nevertheless of the same essence as the universe, a part of endless creation in which death was simply the realignment of matter.

Initially influenced in his concept of the development of man from matter by the biology of Darwin, Davidson went on to reject the idea of natural selection in favour of the then current nebular hypothesis of Laplace and Tyndall.[18] This theory, which was already becoming obsolete in Davidson's day, postulated that in the beginning there existed nothing but the eternal ether, which, from its own will evolved electricity. The initial electricity then reacted with the ether itself to produce hydrogen, out of which all other elements were formed. In time, elements evolved into nebulae and from these came the solar systems with their planets and stars on which inorganic and organic life formed. Man was then realized in the system as part of the original will of the eternal ether, the drive of which is always towards increasing self-consciousness. But just as matter evolves, so it devolves. Planets and stars change and dissolve, and so does man, but, being matter and indestructible, all returns into the eternal process. Man, "the medium of matter's consciousness", was the prime agent in the scheme of increasing knowledge, a knowledge achieved through suffering. That this scientific orientation was also that of Soloviev, will now be evident. To Davidson too, suffering was man's distinction,

> It may be Matter in itself is pain,
> Sweetened in sexual love that so mankind,
> The medium of Matter's consciousness,
> May never cease to know - the stolid bent
> Of Matter, the infinite vanity
> Of the Universe, being ever-more
> Self-knowledge.
> (Testament of a Vivisector, II, pp.328-9)

[18] For a more detailed account of Davidson's interpretation of the theory see Townsend, pp.482-4 and Turnbull's introduction to Poems, I, xxviii.

In his Testaments, Davidson developed a discursive style which he saw as more suited to incorporating his scientific beliefs. Rhyme was to be abandoned and similarly metaphor was to be seen as obsolete. Poetry had to show a direct one-to-one relationship between fact and language because, Davidson claimed, in the future poetry and the knowledge of the world gained from science, would become indistinguishable. A description of the physical properties of a star, for example, would come to be seen as every bit poetic as the deepest and most complex human emotions, for as science would make increasingly clear, spirit and matter were one and the same thing and could not therefore be treated with different sets of responses.

Davidson saw his language as having the potential to embrace new cultural ideals, ideals which would arise from the new understanding, but fundamental to Davidson's scheme was that matter be seen as Absolute. Matter as the primary force was authenticated by the theory of ether, but this theory was to be displaced by that of relativity, which proved to be the complete antithesis of any theory of Absolutes. Einstein's physics revealed a universe in which matter and energy were interconvertible, and accordingly the idea of matter as Absolute was completely invalidated.

As a materialist, MacDiarmid never goes to the extremes of Davidson's position, indeed, while his respect for Davidson's work was great, his summing up of Davidson's position as "God through the wrong end of a telescope" ("Of John Davidson"), suggests that he saw Davidson as having inverted the order of the universe. Against the extremes of the assertion of will of which Davidson had fallen foul, MacDiarmid was able to assert a much broader and more humane view of life, and it was a view sustained by and complementary to the revolution in the perception of the physical properties of the universe.

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Chapter Fourteen

Science and Poetry: Whitehead's 'Philosophy of Organism'

Called locally "the old Rock", Shetland, lying off the north-east tip of Scotland, is more a collection of large rocks than a group of islands. The result of an ancient volcanic eruption, Shetland's northernmost part has geological formations over 2,000 million years old, and the terrain of these islands surrounded as they are by an ever-angry sea, has a desolateness and an isolation that recalls the primordial with an indelible intensity.

Compared to MacDiarmid's native Langholm, treeless Shetland is a barren place. There is only a topsoil on the rock which with the severe winds which buffet the islands is often reduced to a minimum, making it impossible for anything to take root there. When MacDiarmid first arrived on the island he had an initial sense of apprehension and strangeness. Writing about this a few years later he remarked,

> Superficially even the Shetlands are quite unlike Scotland, and, unless the visitor has been prepared in advance, he or she may find it is difficult to account for the sense ... of something wanting. It may take them a little time to realize that what is affecting them is the total absence of trees and running water ("Life in the Shetland Islands" in The Uncanny Scot, pp.89-90).

The sparseness of the island landscape is at first disturbing because it does not have the more obvious pleasures of fertile countryside, but, MacDiarmid noted,

> ... one quickly gets accustomed to that, even if trees and singing streams could be introduced, they would be no improvement; they would simply make the Shetlands like other places we know, whereas without them, the Shetlands are complete in themselves, and the absence of these usual features of the countryside does not involve any deficiency or monotony (p.90).

MacDiarmid wants to suggest that the landscape of Shetland has its own

unique beauty, but it is a beauty which in order to be appreciated demands a kind of re-education of the senses. A landscape of rocks and stones is usually seen as an assortment of shapes, or simply undifferentiated mass. Yet, to MacDiarmid, the island scenes came alive and he saw that stone and rock are every bit as much endowed with the subtleties and distinctions which reveal individuality as all else in the physical world. In stones, MacDiarmid wrote,

> There is no less variety of form and colour ... here it surprises one to discover how easily the presence of trees and rivers can be dispensed with and how, instead of/a sense of loss, we soon realize that their absence throws into relief features we seldom see or underprize because of them - the infinite beauties of the bare land and the shapes and colours of the rocks which first of all impress one with a sense of sameness and next delight one with a revelation of the endless resource of Nature albeit in subtler and less showy or sensational forms than we are accustomed to appreciate in regions of more profuse development (p.90).

The immobility of the landscape was not something to be taken completely for granted by MacDiarmid, for he developed a perception of it that belied such an assumption, and his new awareness arose from a need in him to somehow assimilate himself with this seemingly intractable matter. The very barrenness of the rocks precluded any reassuring or easy reaction, for, Macdiarmid noted,

> It is in fact the treasures and rich lessons of a certain asceticism the Shetlands provide, and these offset in an invaluable way our normal indulgence in scenic display. But the spirit of the Shetlands is not easily or speedily apprehended: one must accustom oneself patiently to a different aspect of the world, a different rhythm of life, before one can fully understand how its variations from what we have been used to are counter-balanced by its own essential qualities. The lack of ostentatious appearances, the seeming bareness and reserve, make the Shetlands insusceptible of being readily or quickly understood; one must steep oneself in them, let them grow upon one, to savour them properly. It is a splendid discipline (p.90).

In this "different aspect of the world", MacDiarmid arrived at a new under-

standing of beauty, a "certain asceticism", which was something quite beyond seeing the stones as simply an image of endurance.

MacDiarmid was to claim that stones have a distinctiveness, an haecceitas, which makes them equal in range, if different in aspect, to other life forms. Because it does not appear to be as animate as the rest of the natural world the geological earth seems alien and remote from human experience. Nevertheless, MacDiarmid would argue, stones are every bit a part of the process informing the universe as we ourselves are, it is simply that the scale of time in which their development takes place is so vast that that kind of change is only apprehended as something intangible. Yet, stones are perceived as substance and are the standard by which substantiality has been defined. What the knowledge of modern physics does, however, is to refute that notion and demands in its place that what had seemed to be solid matter be regarded as a process of relation and interchange.

Einstein's theory of general relativity postulated that matter was but a form of energy and that the two were interconvertible on a space/time continuum. Matter/energy existed in four dimensions, three of which were space (length, breadth and height) welded to one of time.[1] Prior to Einstein's theory, space and time were regarded as distinct entities; space was that which is around us; time, that which moved linearly. But the new theories of matter which saw that all physical events were electrical in structure, hypothesized that electrical phenomena knew no discontinuity in space and time. In nature, space and time being one, all that is exists in a continuum. There is no fixed point or frame of reference, and, therefore, no finality about the nature of reality, only probability.

The porosity of what had been seen as substantial matter was defined by De Broglie, who demonstrated the essential duality of matter;

[1] James Jeans, The Mysterious Universe (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), p.97.

particles of matter were always wave-like and waves were always particle-like. (Jeans, p.36) Schroedinger confirmed this theory, for his experiments demonstrated that the sub-atomic electron, the smallest unit of matter/energy, had wave properties; matter was wave and particle/and was composed of protons and electrons, each the antithesis of the other. (Jeans, pp.68-9) Charged with electricity, matter was composed of particles the antagonistic elements of which ensured that solid matter was constantly melting into radiation, and radiation was constantly reconsolidating itself into solid matter. (Jeans, p.69) Mass which had been perceived as substantial and intractable was in fact involved in constant process, defined by the interaction of opposites, so that the process of the universe was an essential matter/energy duality.

The atom and the electron were found in animate and inanimate forms alike, consequently, it could be claimed that living substance was of the same structure as non-living material. The traditional divisions between animate and inanimate forms were diminished and the possibility that man and his consciousness had emerged from inanimate matter could not be discounted. MacDiarmid's references in On a Raised Beach to the stones as having "intense vibrations", as being possessed of a "volatility", and his whole endeavour in this major work to animate the stone universe and realize himself as part of that universe, is directly attributable to his knowledge of physics and to his directive to poets in S.C. editorials to align themselves with the "ideas of the Relativists" (S.C., June, 1923, p.302).

But this notion of some essential connection between animate and inanimate was also central to Soloviev's philosophy, in which consciousness was the medium which made matter incarnate and immortality was conceived of as eternal recurrence. In a N.A. article,

MacDiarmid reviewing a book by Radoslav Tsanoff, The Problems of Immortality (1924), wrote that this work was an assessment of "various principal philosophical estimates of immortality - Dante, the French Materialists, pluralism like Dr. McTaggart, Nietzsche, the Positivists and Buddhism" ("Towards the New Order", N.A., 26 March, 1925, p.259). Against all these various interpretations, MacDiarmid would set the philosophy of Soloviev, for he wrote,

> ... it is sufficient to regard human consciousness as Vladimir Soloviev regarded it - as the conscious element whereby Saint Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, hopes to reconcile the universe to God. The first task of the conscious is to recognise that this is its duty and its still more or less conscious desire; and the first thing it must do towards the accomplishment of that mighty task is to win to a like consciousness first the unconscious masses of humanity including the dead; then the lower orders of creation, the animals, plants, etc., and finally so-called inanimate matter ... (p.260).

Although the above was written earlier than the date of composition of On a Raised Beach, the fact that exactly the same ideas are restated in the letter on To Circumjack Cencrastus to Helen B. Cruickshank, suggests that Soloviev's ideas continued to pre-occupy MacDiarmid. In addition, included in the volume Stony Limits is the poem "Hymn to Sophia: The Wisdom to God", part of which reads,

> Our broken cries of shame dispute
> Death's pitiless and impious law
> As the whole Earth with straining hearts
> Towards thee we draw ...
>
> And the rose knows us not and wastes
> Its precious power; and in the stone
> Obliviously sleeps a strength
> Beyond our own.
>
> Yet will creation turn to thee
> When, love being perfect, naught can die,
> And clod and plant and animal
> And star and sky,
>
> Thy form immortal and complete,
> Matter and spirit one, acquire,
> - Ceaseless till then, O Sacred Shame,
> Our wills inspire! (C.P. I, p.455)

The mystical and holistic elements of Soloviev's philosophy are, in On a Raised Beach, blended together with MacDiarmid's understanding of the properties of matter, and are supplemented by the ideas of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead's "philosophy of organism", like Soloviev's scheme, was an attempt to construct an all-embracing system which would reconcile divisions between the general abstract theories of science and the more concrete accessible experiences of everyday life. In Whitehead's thought, the new physics was the modern equivalent of Fate in Greek tragedy, for the picture of a determined order against which man had little defence was like the Chorus which insisted relentlessly on "the decrees of fate".[2] To offset the pessimism engendered by such a view, Whitehead sought to provide a new optimism about the nature and direction of human survival.

Whitehead aimed at laying the foundations of a philosophy of the physical sciences which would bring together the new data of physics into closer conjunction with the perceptions and sense-awarenesses which are the material of experience. This kind of synthesis between theory and general practice was, to Whitehead, the traditional way in which man had formed his metaphysical picture of the world, and was the way in which the human idea of significance became reality. The new abstractions of science had to be made more readily accessible, for Whitehead believed that "a civilisation which cannot burst through its current abstractions is doomed to sterility after a limited period of progress" (pp.82-3).

The dichotomy between science and art, most identifiable in nineteenth-century literature, was a symptom of discord in consciousness. Wordsworth and Shelley are cited by Whitehead as examples of poets who in refusing to accept "the abstract materialism of science", evolved instead the organic theory of nature. (p.121) What these poets had given expression to was the "deep intuition of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact" (pp.121-2).

[2] Science and the Modern World (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), pp.14-15.

This earlier clash between aesthetic and scientific views indicated to Whitehead that there must exist some higher truth about the nature of the universe which would ultimately reconcile these opposing viewpoints, would bring the values expressed in art and the empirical observations of science into a new unity. This central thesis of Whitehead's, is expressed by MacDiarmid in poetic terms, in The Kind of Poetry I Want,

> A poetry therefore which will constantly render
> In all connexions such service
> As the protest of the nature poetry of the great English poets
> Of the Nineteenth century on behalf of value,
> On behalf of the organic view of nature,
> A protest, invaluable to science itself,
> Against the exclusion of value
> From the essence of matter of fact. (L. P. p. 188)

Modern physics, Whitehead saw, dispensed with the old laws of causation and set in their place a world of process in which movement occurred through constantly interlocking structures, thus connecting all things. Such a reorientation in the perception of the universe would make for a new understanding of the relationship of science and art and could reconcile science with the way in which humanity had traditionally expressed communal value, that is, religion. As it continued to develop, science would increasingly seek to explain the phenomena of the universe and ultimately would demystify religious experience. (p. 262) Religious thought would then acquire an "increasing accuracy of expression" and would develop away from its previously repressive role towards an active searching after new aesthetic modes which would seek to express the sense of the whole in the parts, would always be in some sense metaphysical. (p. 262) The mind of man, interacting with his environment, was capable of reinterpreting the natural world and "great art", Whitehead claimed, represented just that "arrangement of the environment so as to provide for the soul vivid, but transient,

values". (p.283) Nature, to Whitehead, was not self-contained, for it both acted on and was acted upon. Nature could only exist in relation to consciousness, and its fundamental property was the potential of becoming known to mind.

Whitehead's philosophy was thus, for MacDiarmid, a confirmation through modern physics of the integrated intuitions of Soloviev, for both emphasized consciousness as an active religious force. Furthermore, the synthesis of mind and matter present in the work of both philosophers was equated by MacDiarmid with dialectical materialism, for he saw that the antithetical quality of matter described by Soloviev and by physics complemented Marx's concept of historical development. (L.P., p.154) Given this added synthesis of what had been a fundamental aesthetic position, MacDiarmid interpreted the poetic task as being one which "extended" or activated consciousness by vivifying parts of the natural world which had not been apprehended in a way which made for their integration into the whole. MacDiarmid set out to educate eyes and minds to a new way of "seeing" and his perception of the nature of the stone beach is his most fully articulated piece, for it sets before us a "new" world of nature in which the complexity of stone structure is opened up to general experience.

To this new phase of his poetic development, MacDiarmid was to give the name "a poetry of fact", a description of method he had found in Whitman, whom he quoted as follows,

> '... the true use for the imaginative faculty in modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong to every real thing, and to real things only. Without that ultimate vivification - which the poet or other artist alone can give - reality would seem incomplete, and science, democracy, and life itself, finally in vain' (L.P., p.188)

This plea echoes Whitehead's argument for a synthesis of religion and science

in which art would function as the concrete expression of the facts of science and vision and values of religion. MacDiarmid restates this idea, in poetic form,

> A poetry fully alive to all the implications
> Of the fact that one of the great triumphs
> Of poetic insight was the way in which
> It prepared the minds of many
> For the conception of evolution,
> The degree to which the popular mind
> Was sensitized by it to the appeal of Nature,
> And thus how poetry has progressed
> Until, for example, flowers
> Can never be thought again
> In a generalized way.
> Chaucer's 'floures white and rede'
> Gave way in Spenser's April eclogue,
> To pinks, columbines, gilly-flowers,
> Coronations, sops-in-wine, cowslips (The Kind of Poetry I Want, C.P. II, P.1027)
> Paunce, and chevisaunce ...

According to MacDiarmid, the insights of the poet prepare the more general consciousness of man to appreciate and understand in an ever-evolving way the nature of the universe and the place of man in that scheme. The poet does this, MacDiarmid would have it, through his ability to define and describe individual parts of the natural world, but he also has to reintegrate those parts into one whole within which it is possible for man to find both location and significance. MacDiarmid's references to Chaucer and Spenser suggest that he sees a progressive development in the powers of perception, in the way, for example, that the poetry of Anglo-Saxon has only a limited language for colours, while the range is extended in poetry of later eras.[3] Similarly, MacDiarmid would suggest that man in his primitive condition would have experienced himself as alien to the world but gradually integrated himself by responding to the natural scene as if it were simply an extension of the human. This progressive process, detected in Chaucer and Spenser, is developed by succeeding generations, "By poets like

[3]MacDiarmid's assumption that Chaucer had only a limited vocabulary for flowers is incorrect. In The Parlement of Foules, Chaucer's description of "floures, white, blewe, yelwe and rede", is limited but in works like The Legend of Good Women, for example, specific names of flowers, for example, "rose" and "dayseye" are used.

Herbert and Vaughan/Tree and plant were recognised as having a place/ In the same economy of which man was a part...." MacDiarmid obviously saw himself following such a tradition when he brought his own poetic abilities to bear in animating the material word.

In On a Raised Beach, MacDiarmid wants to extend perception by attempting to bring to attention a new awareness of the intractable geological universe. Modern physics had demonstrated in abstract terms that the world of stone was every bit as animate as the world of plants, trees and men, but what MacDiarmid wanted to do was make that experience accessible.

MacDiarmid's perception of his raised beach was therefore an attempt to realize the facts of science in the world of experience and such an endeavour reconciles for MacDiarmid the functions of poetry and science, not simply by making them complementary activities, but by assigning to them the same direction of purpose, that of making the hitherto unknown available and comprehensible, and of finding within that freshly gained territory of consciousness a new significance.

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Chapter Fifteen

'On a Raised Beach'

A raised beach is a geological structure formed by the action of waves and wind over long stretches of time. Often found inland or at least some distance from shore lines, such beaches are an indication of change in the earth's contours. Rich in fossil deposits these beaches are ancient formations of the Pleistocene age. Raised beaches are common along the west coast of Scotland but in Shetland itself there are few. The beach of MacDiarmid's poem might well have been, therefore, an imaginary one, but the poem itself may have been born out of an experience MacDiarmid had on a deserted island where he spent a few days by himself shortly after he arrived in Shetland.

The island of Linga lies directly across from Whalsay and it is significant that MacDiarmid wrote of his stay there,

> I arranged with the boatman who took me over from the inhabited island of Whalsay to the uninhabited island of Linga to train his telescope on a given spot on the third day afterwards in the early afternoon, and, if I was seen standing there, to come over and fetch me. If not, to keep doing so every afternoon thereafter until I was so seen - if I ever was. The boatman suspected that I might commit suicide, but he did not communicate his suspicions to anyone else; he did as he was told; he trained his telescope on the arranged spot in the early afternoon of the third day, but he was a bit of a Nelson. I was not there, as a matter of fact, but, even if I had been, he could not have seen me for a thick wall of fog (one of the many little matters I had not foreseen or provided for in the arrangements I made). Nevertheless, he came, and I returned to Whalsay with him ("Life in the Shetland Islands" in The Uncanny Scot, p.80).

MacDiarmid went on to state that his visit to the island had been a kind of "Robinson Crusoe" experiment, for he wanted to experience at first hand how it would feel to be left completely to his own resources and he took no provisions with him. However, considering the fact that he mentions the boatman's suspicion of a planned suicide, and given the state of mind he was in when he first arrived in Shetland, this incident may have had a great deal more significance than he was prepared to assign to it at a later date.

MacDiarmid wrote that surviving on the island was much more difficult than he had imagined it would be. He recalled,

> I slept in a cave in the rocks. It was very cold, and in any case I should say 'lay at nights' instead of 'slept', because I found the glug-glug of the water against the rocks and the roar of the tides in a little bed of shingle away up at the top of the cave very annoying. There are no trees in the Shetlands; so it was impossible to find any sheltered spot on the surface of the island to lie in; and there is no bracken or long grass, so it was impossible to gather anything to make any sort of bed on my ledge of rock ... lying for the most part on that rocky ledge with the sound of sea in my ears and the darkness of the cave (broken only by the yellow flashing of innumerable matches and the red glow of my lit pipe) grateful to my eyes, doing nothing - but what I intended to do, which was sufficiently engrossing to keep me from being lonely or conscious very much of either cold or hunger; for I am a poet myself, or I think I am, which explains the whole thing (pp.82-3).

Although MacDiarmid romanticized his experience on the island, he also conveys in the above the sense in which the situation and the atmosphere of isolation contained the stimulus for a poetic mood, and while he does not elaborate on whether or not he wrote out of this specific experience, it is clear that the situation was full of meaning for him.

Whatever the true nature of the time he spent on Linga, it is apparent that the poem which came out of his initial response to Shetland was not

only a great statement of faith in the course and purpose of life, but was also the most original work he produced. There are two known versions of On a Raised Beach, the published work which is dedicated to James H. Whyte,[1] and a fair copy manuscript. The latter version is presented together with a discussion of the essential differences between the two works, in Appendix 'A'.

The version of On a Raised Beach published in Stony Limits is composed of eleven sections of uneven length. The opening and closing stanzas are in what MacDiarmid described as his "synthetic English", a compound form of language similar to that used in the poem dedicated to Charles Doughty. One short middle section of the poem uses the Norn which is peculiar to Shetland, but the rest of the poem is in a discursive style which, despite its being peppered with geological terms, Biblical quotations and literary and scientific references, is readily accessible because most often the more obscure references are carried by their context.

The poem is in free verse throughout, with MacDiarmid completely abandoning in this work the more traditional structured metrics of his earlier achievements. The work is, however, carefully wrought with pattern and order being achieved primarily through parallelism, repetition and cadence, supplemented, particularly in the opening and closing passages, by alliteration and assonance, as in the lines,

[1]James H. Whyte was a wealthy young American with Scottish ancestry who came to live in Scotland and became part of the literary scene in the 1930's. The relationship between MacDiarmid and Whyte does not seem to have been much more than a business one, and it was probably out of a sense of courtesy or perhaps obligation that the poem is dedicated to him. In Octobiography (Montrose: Standard Press, 1976), Helen B. Cruickshank recorded that Whyte arrived in Scotland shortly before his twenty-first birthday and became founder editor of The Modern Scot, a quarterly which was issued from St. Andrews. During the thirties Whyte came to know most of the writers in Scotland and seems to have aided several of them financially by publishing their work, etc. Whyte remained in Scotland until the outbreak of war in 1939 when, after becoming the victim of rumour about spy activities, he returned to America.

All is lithogenesis - or lochia,
Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree,
Stones blacker than any in the Caaba,
Cream-coloured caen-stone, chatoyant pieces,
Celadon and corbeau, bistre and beige,
Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform,
Making mere faculae of the sun and moon ... (C.P. I, p.422)

This seemingly fragmented pile of words is the linguistic equivalent of the stones of the beach. Here, language has been made strange in order to evoke that same sense of disturbance which MacDiarmid had described as his initial reaction to the landscape of Shetland. In order to free that which in its everyday appearance has not been acutely perceived, MacDiarmid has to present the familiar as if it were incomprehensible, so that through engagement with that very incomprehensibility, a new stage in the development of perception is made available. MacDiarmid is using language in much the same way that modern movements in the visual arts, for example Cubism, created a displacement in order to refocus attention on the dynamics of space. MacDiarmid's use of words in this passage is free of figurative and symbolic method for what he is concerned to do is to call attention to the individuality of words in themselves in exactly the same way that he wants understanding to be directed to the nature of the stone beach. Each word has to be picked up, turned around, examined and explored until it surrenders its inner force, for only when response to individual uniqueness has been established can the possibility of meaning emerge.

The selection and placing of the words seem at first sight completely random, but as the passage is studied, its order is released. The parallel phrasing of the opening "All is lithogenesis - or lochia" is carried through the successive lines, "celadon and corbeau", "bistre and beige", "glout and gloss", "optik to haptik", "arris by arris", "burr by burr" and "chiliad by chiliad". Set against this parallelism there is an alternate patterning taking

place in lines which have a string of single descriptive words, "Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform" and "slickensides, truité, rugas, foveoles". Taken together, these alternating rhythms suggest the piling up of stones, a kind of echoing and repetition which simulates the action of the formation of the beach. This measured rhythm with its suggestion of prolonged and repeated action acts as the perfect counterfoil to the breadth of historical and cultural meanings which are actually located within the dense language of the passage.

The opening line, "All is lithogenesis - or lochia", carries the full suggestion of origins. "Lithogenesis" is a composite word from lithos -- stone, and genesis -- birth, and the emphasis is on the origin of all things from stone. "Lochia" is a medical term, or to be more precise, a term used in physiology, that branch of medicine which deals with processes, to describe part of the aftermath of childbirth. This is a particularly puzzling word in the passage until it is associated with the metaphors of parturition used by Nietzsche and Soloviev (and reinterpreted by Orage)[2] to describe the evolution or "second birth" of consciousness. Together the two words point to the interrelation of inorganic and organic matter, everything being in some way stone, or part of the birth process.

The inclusion of the Biblical Genesis in "lithogenesis" is a potential meaning of the word which is carried forward into the second line, "Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree", a reference to the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden and yet another emphasis on origins. The fruit of the Eden tree is fossilized, "Carpolite", suggesting, perhaps, that the "forbidden" knowledge was the true nature of man's origins. The reference to the sacred stone of the Moslems, "Stones

[2] Consciousness: Animal Human and Superman (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1907), pp.74-5. An example of Orage's use of this metaphor is as follows, "If we regard human consciousness as, in itself, no more than the antenatal condition of the superman, then it is plain that what the mystics call the second birth, the interior birth, is the coming forth within the mind of a being hitherto embryonic."

blacker than any in the Caaba", like the "Carpolite fruit" of Eden, points to stone as associated with or symbolic of religious belief.

"Lithogenesis" and "Carpolite" have pertinent etymological connotations. The first suggests lithography and with it the whole idea of engraving and writing on stone, including perhaps, ancient runic writing and the birth of the "Word" of Genesis. The second points to, not only the study of fossilized fruit and seed, but the word "carp", to talk incessantly. The description of the actual physical attributes of the stones which follows on, carries the idea of potential language being present in them. Stones are referred to as "chatoyant" pieces, "chat" again emphasizing the linguistic, while the word as a whole conjures up the light-bearing and light-reflecting capacity of stone, like the mineral "cat's eye".

The visual experience the stones offer is catalogued; they are "blacker" than the Moslems' holy stone; they are "cream-coloured caen-stone", like the stone of the great Norman churches; they have the grey-green delicacy of Chinese porcelain, "Celadon"; they are black-green like a crow, "corbeau"; they are "bistre" the colour of dark beechwood ash, and "beige" a light contrasting with the black; they are the blue-gray of the mineral glauconite; they are "hoar" white with frost or age, like the old standing stones; they are "enfouldered", charged with light and are "cyathiform" resembling cup-shaped blooms in this geological garden. As he had demonstrated in his early lyrics, MacDiarmid knew how to particularize through colour, but here extends that capacity to subtle relations of colour and light. The stress on light as the source of colour is part of his concern here to emphasize that light waves are present in the structure of stone, to the degree that "sun and moon" are to be seen as "mere faculae", bright points of light that form part, not the whole, of the light/energy producing capacity of the universe.

This description of the visual properties of the stones employs a vocabulary which is indicative of the structure and function, both in ancient and modern terms, of the nature of stone. Stone has been connected with the foundations of Christian and Moslem religions; it has been identified in its structural function with the architecture of places of worship, the mediaeval Norman churches made from "caen-stone" and the hoar stone circles of the Druids or Celts. The properties of stone have been associated with human physiology and this idea of organic process as inherent in stone was extended in the description of stone as "corbeau" and "bistre" into animal and vegetable respectively. Geological terminology has been used to describe the composition of stone -- "carpolite", "chatoyant", "glaucous", "cyathiform" -- suggesting simultaneously, their organic and distinctively mineral properties, and the astronomical term, "faculae", has been used to set in relation the idea of stones as fundamental matter/energy.

These words are the vocabulary in both a special and general sense for understanding the nature of substantial matter, but what becomes clear is that the exercise of even such a range of terms as these, does not come close to expressing the multiplicity that is seen in this stone landscape. This point is made directly in the lines which follow on,

> I study you glout and gloss, but have
> No cadrans to adjust you with, and turn again
> From optik to haptik and like a blind man run
> My fingers over you, arris by arris, burr by burr,
> Slickensides, truité, rugas, foveoles,
> Bringing my aesthesia in vain to bear,
> An angle-titch to all your corrugations and coigns,
> Hatched foraminous cavo-rilievo of the world,
> Deictic, fiducial stones ... (C.P. I, pp.422-3)

The stones are to be studied. They are like a text, a "gloss", which will unlock meaning. But the message contained in the stones cannot be easily interpeted, for there is no way of measuring them, he has "no cadrans to adjust you with", there are no existing terms of

reference which can be usefully applied to their dissection. The starting point can only be to approach the stones through the natural instruments of experience -- the senses. Moving now from some appreciation of the visual impact of the stones to their shape and texture through touch, "from optik to haptik", the intricacies of stone surfaces are explored. Their angularity and roughness is experienced, "arris by arris, burr by burr", words which again suggest the architectural function of stone.[3] The stones are "slickensides", they are smooth and slippery like a fish, as "truité" suggests; their distinctive geological properties are described, they are covered with pitting ("foveoles"), they have wrinkled surfaces ("rugas"), they have "corrugations" and "coigns". All of this specialized language however is seen as offering just a glancing knowledge, "an angle-titch", to the multifariousness of stone.

The raised beach is described as a sculptured relief, a "cavo-rilievo", a piece of natural art which has been "hatched" from the giant egg that is the geological earth. Referred to as "foraminous" the beach is a passageway which leads from the earth's core to the surface. In that sense the beach is to be seen as essential matter, something which is "Deictic", proving or pointing to origins and its stones are "fiducial", something to be held in trust or accepted as a condition of faith. As the idea of the use of stone in art is introduced, the questions now being raised stretch out to the meta-physical. Once again the question of origins is raised,

> Chiliad by chiliad,
> What bricole piled you here, stupendous cairn?
> What artist poses the Earth écorché thus,
> Pillar of creation engouled in me?
> What eburnation augments you with men's bones
> Every energumen an Endymion yet?

[3]An arris is a sharp exterior angle formed at the intersection of two surfaces not in the same plane, seen, for example, in the raised edges which separate the flutings in a Doric column. A burr is any sharp ridge or protrusion.

All the other stones are in this haecceity it seems,
But where is the Christophanic rock that moved?
What Cabirian song from this catasta comes? (C.P. I, p.423)

What force, it is asked, could have created such a structure as this. How were the stones formed in stretches of time counted in the thousands ("Chiliad by Chiliad") shaped into this great mound-like grave or cairn? What artist could have arranged this model of matter, this écorché?[4] In what way is this great "pillar of creation" continuous with, or "engouled"[5] in human existence? What kind of process is it in the stones, what "eburnation",[6] connects them to the solid part of man's being, the "bones" of his anatomy, so that every particle of energy, every "energumen"[7] waits to be awakened to actuality, like the mythical shepherd Endymion who lay sleeping eternally?[8]

The problem of how to interpret the significance of the human relationship to inanimate matter is the central question. This beach represents the "haecceity" of stone, so that everything in it, as well as the structure itself has a "thisness" which seems to belong in an ordered creation. But where, it is asked, is the proof of this order,

[4]In pictorial art an écorché is a figure in which the muscles are represented stripped of skin for the purpose of studying the dynamics of movement.

[5]Engouling is a characteristic of Celtic art which shows the human form as entering the mouths of animals, so that the two forms appear continuous.

[6]Eburnation is a change in the composition of bone which makes bone more dense and hard, like ivory.

[7]In Aristotelian philosophy, Energumen is that which possesses to the full its specific essence or actuality. The word is also applied to the activity that transforms potentiality into actuality.

[8]Endymion in Greek mythology is the shepherd of whom Diana (Selene, the moon) became enamoured. She caused him to sleep forever that she might enjoy his beauty.

where is "the Christophanic rock that moved?"[9] Where is the proof or miracle that an informing spirit which can offer spiritual sustenance from the rocks themselves, does exist? What "Cabirian song",[10] what primitive truth, can be released from the stones, this "catasta",[11] which must represent something more than a symbol of slavery.

The opening of the poem has compacted into the first twenty four lines a vast representative reference to the nature of substantial matter, so that what had initially seemed totally incomprehensible is in fact a compressed form of the range of knowledge relating to the geological universe. But encyclopaedic as these lines are, they offer more, for what has been raised are questions dealing with man's relation to inanimate matter, the course and purpose of a universe seen as essentially material and the condition of faith in such a world as this.

This question of belief in an order seen as primarily material is posed in direct and plain language in the second stanza,

> Deep conviction or preference can seldom
> Find direct terms in which to express itself.
> Today on this shingle shelf
> I understand this pensive reluctance so well,
> This not discommendable obstinancy,
> These contrivances of an inexpressive critical feeling
> These stones with their resolve that Creation shall not be
> Injured by iconoclasts and quacks ... (C.P. I, p.423)

Echoing as these lines do, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach", what is brought to bear is the central tragic statement of Arnold's poem. When Arnold

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[9] Corinthians 10: 1-4. Moreover, brothers, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea. 2. And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3. And did all eat the same spiritual meat. 4. And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that Spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

[10] The Cabiri were ancient divinities venerated in Greece, Phoenicia and Asia Minor, as the founders of the human race and as the originators of religious belief. Their rites were profoundly secret and their origins are obscure, but some authorities claim that Eastern mythology and Druidism or Celticism contain traces of the Cabiri.

[11] A catasta was the stone block on which slaves were sold in ancient Rome.

wrote of the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar ... down the vast edges drear/and naked shingles of the world", he was describing a world deprived of the comfort of religious belief, belief which had once, like a "bright girdle furled", enclosed the world. With the vision of faith removed, Arnold perceived that all that was left was the despair of a material reality in which man's essential state was one of conflict, a universe where "ignorant armies clash by night".

MacDiarmid's poem would insist on the kind of confrontation to be found in "Dover Beach", but his own resolution, while resting on the same profound questioning, will not be one of despair. The tragic view of life present in MacDiarmid's early lyrics and related there to his use of the ballad, finds its fullest expression in On a Raised Beach. What tragedy represents for MacDiarmid, is a form of questioning in which the extremes of human life are tested against a universe seen as antagonistic. As he interpreted it in Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, tragedy related to the suffering of the human spirit in its struggle to triumph over circumstance. This assertion of will or spirit was one which demanded an ability to pass from the temporal and finite to the infinite and absolute. Tragedy always found resolution in some transcendental course, that is why Nietzsche described it as "metaphysical solace". It was possible to derive from tragic confrontation a new belief in existence, even when it was recognized that the ultimate form of the universe will forever be beyond human grasp. From the confrontation itself and from the striving after the absolute, the condition of faith emerges, and it is exactly this process which MacDiarmid's poem follows. Unable to accept religious doctrine as an adequate explanation of human circumstance, yet not prepared to discard the spiritual strength of religious belief, he seeks significance within the material limitations of existence --

expressed in the image of the stone beach -- and from this struggle to realize a place in the order of things evolves a secular faith.

As the stone beach is contemplated, it is recalled that the only thing which has been seen to move there since "this morning an eternity ago" is one solitary bird. The bird is associated with the stones because, like them, it has "inward gates", it has an openness which makes the joy of its song readily available. But it may be (as the last line of the opening stanza has suggested) that the stones have a song too, for their "gates" are also open,

> Always open, far longer open, than any bird's can be,
> That every one of them has had its gates wide open far longer
> Than all birds put together, let alone humanity,
> Though through them no man can see,
> No man nor anything more recently born than themselves,
> And that is everything else on earth. (C.P. I, p.423)

The stones, it is suggested, may represent one of the most important messages of nature and might therefore be a new key to understanding the relationship between man and inanimate matter. But the secret that the stones keep may be death, complete and absolute annihilation of the whole of the human species, "So much has perished and all will yet perish in these stones". Yet, such a possibility has to be faced with equanimity,

> I am no more indifferent or ill-disposed to life than death is;
> I would fain accept it all completely as the soil does;
> Already I feel all that can perish perishing in me
> As so much has perished and all will yet perish in these stones.
> I must begin with these stones as the world began. (C.P. I, p.424)

What has to be accepted is that the condition of human life is essentially tragic, "all will yet perish". Yet, at the same time it is essential to seek within that limitation some kind of spiritual significance, and what is suggested is that the stones themselves may offer such significance. The Biblical allusion, "Bread from stones",

which occurs halfway through the passage, carries the reference to "Christophanic rock" forward, suggesting yet again the relationship between basic human beliefs and material fundamentals.[12]

It is made clear that the starting point of understanding cannot lie in any blind commitment to doctrine. Belief must develop from contact with the stones themselves, "I must begin with these stones as the world began". What if it is possible, it is asked, to know the nature and purpose of existence, of how "the world's course ran"? Would this not be simply a transient form of understanding, as in a fundamental sense, in a world seen as evolutionary process, it must be? Has there, the question recurs, ever really been any development in spiritual terms beyond what "iconoclasts and quacks" offer as the idea of human progress, after all the stones "have dismissed/All but all of evolution". That being so, how then is it possible to talk about human progress against such temporal dimensions as the stones represent? Seen on an evolutionary scale, humanity is the infant of the universe and there is no guarantee that all our past and future too will survive, "(Is there anything to come they will not likewise dismiss?)". The stones have seen cultural and historical movements come and go, more importantly, they have also been silent witness to the fact that the real life of humanity, the life of the "mass", has seen no true development, for, like the stones of the beach which have been perceived as simply undifferentiated substance, failure to establish for all humanity an individuality and uniqueness has meant that for the majority of mankind there has been no progress, they live lives identical to that of their "ancestors".

[12]There are two Biblical quotations which refer to "Bread from stones"; Matthew 4: 3, "And when the tempter came to him, he said, if thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread"; Matthew 7: 9, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone". Both may apply in this context.

As if to answer the doubts that have been raised, it is immediately asserted that even given the inevitability, and in terms of the second law of thermodynamics, the finality, of an evolutionary process, there is validity in knowing as much as possible about the nature of existence, if only because the struggle for survival is of the nature of man's purpose and will reveal his finest qualities, even as it has done in the animal kingdom,

> Actual physical conflict or psychological warfare
> Incidental to love or food
> Brings out animal life's bolder and more brilliant patterns
> Concealed as a rule in habitude.
> There is a sudden revelation of colour,
> The protrusion of a crest,
> The expansion of an ornament,
> - But no general principle can be guessed
> From these flashing fragments we are seeing,
> These foam-bells on the hidden currents of being. (C.P. I, p.424)

While it may never be possible to know the function of life, it is nevertheless possible to see, it is made clear, that the meaning of life's "patterns" is contained within the striving itself. At the same time, however, what has to be understood is that all human endeavour will ultimately, "come back to the likeness of stone". Any understanding which can be achieved, it is stated, will not be re-assuring and will not elevate man to any position of superiority in the universe.

The purpose of life, it is suggested, must be to come to terms with intractable reality. Again it is insisted that the starting point of knowledge must be with the stones,

> We must be humble. We are so easily baffled by appearances
> And do not realise that these stones are one with the stars.

Trusting too much to the evidence of our senses, we misread the facts of nature, for the seeming substantiality of stone does not reveal the

dynamic of its true physical nature. Similarly, we have missed the ease of assimilation which is part of the power of stones, for stone is indifferent as to whether it forms the "high or low" parts of creation, whether it is "mountain peak" or "ocean floor". Matter is continuous with existence, for, "There are plenty of ruined buildings in the world but no ruined stones/No visitor comes from the stars/ But is the same as they are". Stones have survived the creations of every human civilization, and even "visitors from the stars", meteors falling to earth, have the same physical properties as stones.

The first point of recognition is to accept that inanimate matter is infused with the same kind of fundamental energy which pervades the rest of the universe. Stones do have

> An adjustment to life, an ability
> To ride it easily, akin to the buoyant
> Prelapsarian naturalness of a country girl
> Laughing in the sun, not passion-rent,
> But sensing in the bound of her breasts vigours to come
> Powered to make her one with the stream of earthlife round her,
> But not yet as my Muse is, with this ampler scope,
> This more divine rhythm, wholly at one
> With the earth, riding the Heavens with it, as the stones do
> And all soon must. (C.P. I, p.425)

The quotation in the above lines is a blend of F.R. Leavis's comments on a poem by Ronald Bottrall called "The Loosening" and includes lines from the poem itself.[13] In the passage Leavis makes a plea for a

[13]This quotation was identified by Ruth McQuillan in her article, "On a Raised Beach" in Akros, Vol. 12, Nos. 34-5, Aug., 1977, p.90. The original appears in Leavis's New Bearings in English Poetry and reads as follows, "The poet glimpses a recovered spontaneity, a re-adjustment to life an ability to ride it easily, analogous to the buoyant prelapsarian 'naturalness' of the farm-girl who

> Poised herself like a falcon at check
> Amid the unfooted ploughland,
> Laughter splashing from her mouth and
> Rippling down her brown neck:
> Not passion-rent she
> But sensing in the bound
> Of her breasts vigours to come, free
> As air and powered to make her one
> With the stream of earth-life around.

Must we despair of attaining a new naturalness at the far side of the experience of disharmony (p.209).

return to a "new naturalness at the far side of the experience of disharmony", which Leavis describes Bottrell as moving towards in his poem. Yet, the girl of the poem only moves with the "stream of earthlife", not like the "Muse" of MacDiarmid's poem which aspires to a "divine rhythm".

The lesson of the stones is that they offer a "detachment that shocks our instincts and ridicules our desires". The stones are completely indifferent to human aspirations, for in the geological time scale the ideas and hopes of humanity are seen to be replaced with a rapidity which reduces all human endeavour to the ridiculous. Even "all the religions",

> All the material sacrifices and moral restraints
> That in twenty thousand years have brought us no nearer to God
> Are irrelevant to the ordered adjustments
> Out of reach of perceptive understanding
> Forever taking place on the Earth and in the unthinkable regions around it;
> (C.P., I, p.426)

All that is understood as human culture has no place in the "ordered adjustments" that stones make, for stones are not "immobile". They represent a "reality volatile yet determined" which is impossible to grasp by "perceptive understanding" alone. Perceptual capacities have their limitations, for the activity in the stones, their "intense vibrations", had gone undetected until modern physics showed that mass is in continual movement, a movement perpetual in time and infinite in space. Interpreted according to physics, of all earthly material, stones alone are not "redundant", they are essential matter/energy and the only thing which can replace them is a "new creation of God".

In this sense the stones are fundamental reality and that is why it is important to know them, not simply in an objective way, but by entering into them and attempting to experience ourselves as part of their infinite movement, and that is exactly what MacDiarmid attempts to do,

I must get into this stone world now.
Ratchel, striae, relationships of tesserae,
   Innumerable shades of grey,
   Innumerable shapes,
And beneath them all a stupendous unity,
Infinite movement visibly defending itself
Against all the assaults of weather and water,
Simultaneously mobilized at full strength
At every point of the universal front,
   Always at the pitch of its powers,
   The foundation and end of all life. (C.P. I, p.426)

Again geological terms are used to explore the stone world, and this time the terms are all related to some form of stone movement: "Ratchel" describes fragments of loose stone which have become free of underlying firm rock; "Striae" are the parallel lines which occur on glaciated rock, caused by stones frozen into the base of a moving ice-sheet and by rock surfaces along which movement has taken place during faulting; "Tesserae" are caused by movement in rocks which takes place when crustal blocks produced by rifts form a mosaic pattern. All these terms apply to identifiable changes in rock, changes which have been observed and recorded and a specialized language developed to describe them.

Now an entirely new vocabulary is introduced. The stones are identified by Norn words,

hraun,
Duss, ronis, queedaruns, kollyarun;
They hvarf me in all directions
Over the hurdifell - klett, millya hellya, hellyina bretta,
Hellyina wheeda, hellyina grø, bakka, ayre, -
And lay my world in kolgref.[14] (C.P.I, p.427)

[14]The passage in Norn is derived primarily from Jakob Jakobsen's, The Dialect and Place Names of Shetland (Lerwick: Manson, 1897). The words used are actual place names in Shetland, the meaning of which are given by Jakobsen as follows: "Hraun - a rough or rocky place, a wilderness. In Shetland dialect 'roni' is commonly applied to a heap of stones (a cairn). In place-names the word denotes a rocky hill (knoll, brae) or plateau. Sometimes the word as the latter part of a compound is contracted into "run" as Queedaruns, 'white ronis', kollyarun 'round-topped hill'. Duss - a (thrown up) heap. Applied to cairns or any stone heap. Hvarf - (1) 'turning' (2) 'disappearance'. Hurdifell - a steep rocky hill, full of down-fallen boulders. Klett - a piece of rock, also applied collectively to the shore rocks, a stretch of low rocky shore. Hellya - a piece of smooth rock,

The use of Norn words here indicates the way in which that language has developed an extra descriptive capacity for stone in response to a natural environment which is primarily rocky. The implication is that language expands and adapts according to need, developing distinctions and subtleties suited to the requirements of a particular way of life.

These words, like the stones they describe, are not to be regarded as the ruins of past cultures and beliefs; these are not the "broken images" of Eliot's The Waste Land, which is now quoted directly.[15] The stones of the beach do not represent "fear in a handful of dust"; they

generally at the sea shore. Millya Hellya - 'between' (the smooth rocks). Hellyina Bretta - 'The steep rock', a place name in Fetlar. Wheeda - 'the white rock', located specifically in Yell. Grø - 'the grey rock'. Bakka - Bakki is the old Norn word for cliff or 'banks' and means a 'steep rocky shore'. Ayre - a beach or piece of sandy (gravelly) shore. Kolgref - Gref denotes a pit or hollow. Used as an expression in Yell, 'to lay anything in kolgref', means to do anything roughly, especially in delving, thus, to leave an uneven surface on the ground, as rocks do." For a discussion of MacDiarmid's use of dictionaries in passages like the above see Ruth McQuillan's "MacDiarmid's Other Dictionary" in Lines, No.66, Sept., 1978, pp.5-14.

[15] The passage from The Waste Land which is referred to above is as follows,

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water ...
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
> (T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems: 1909-1962, 2nd edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p.63).

must be a key to a new truth. But the only way to understand that truth is by imitating the action of stone,

> It is necessary to make a stand and maintain it forever,
> These stones go through Man, straight to God, if there is one.
> What have they not gone through already?
> Empires, civilizations, aeons. Only in them
> If in anything, can His creation confront Him.
> They came so far out of the water and halted forever. (C.P. I, p.427)

The confrontation with the facts of creation must take place through the stones, for,

> Who thinks God is easier to know than they are?
> Trying to reach men any more, any otherwise, than they are?
> These stones will reach us long before we reach them.
> Cold, undistracted, eternal and sublime. (C.P. I, p.427)

The way to the stones ultimately leads, however, back to death, "they will reach us long before we reach them". But death itself, the "physical horror", loses its fear and thoughts of "suicide" likewise are dismissed,

> Death is a physical horror to me no more.
> I am prepared with everything else to share
> Sunshine and darkness and wind and rain
> And life and death bare as these rocks though it be
> In whatever order nature may decree,
> But, not indifferent to the struggle yet
> Nor to the ataraxia[16] I might get
> By fatalism, a deeper issue see
> Than these, or suicide, here confronting me. (C.P. I, p.428)

Hope lies in the stones, for to reach them is to come to a new understanding,

> It is reality that is at stake.
> Being and non-being with equal weapons here
> Confront each other for it, non-being unseen
> But always on the point, it seems, of showing clear,
> Though its reserved contagion may breed
> This fancy too in my still susceptible head
> And then by its own hidden movement lead
> Me as by aesthetic vision to the supposed
> Point where by death's logic everything is recomposed,

[16]The term ataraxia was originally used by Epicurus to describe a state of serene freedom from pain but later came to mean more of a stoical, calm indifference to life, the latter being the sense in which it is used above.

Object and image one, from their severance freed,
As I sometimes, still wrongly, feel 'twixt this storm beach and me. (C.P. I, p.428)

"Reality" is the contest between what is perceived and what exists in potential, the conflict between "being and non-being". "Non-being", or the unknown, may seem the less valid of the two, but that may not be so, for the unknown is "always on the point ... of showing clear". "Non-being" can seem to be simply subjectivity, "pure fancy", yet, if trusted, the intuitive instinct can lead by its own process, its own "hidden movement", to a new and valid unity, to an "aesthetic vision". Aesthetic insight, a transcendental process, is a condition resembling death, for in both states everything is realigned, "re-composed". The external world, the objective inanimate world of substance, can fuse with the mind image of that substance, an image which anticipates the movement, vitality and reality of stone. In aesthetic vision, the haecceity of stone is seized, and through that apprehension comes an understanding of the links between the temporal and the eternal.

The stones represent a reality which demands that "We must reconcile ourselves to the stones/Not the stones to us". Accepting this idea as fundamental will lead humanity to enter into a "simple and sterner, more beautiful world/Austerely intoxicating". Such a vision suggests,

> a sense of perfect form,
> The end seen from the beginning, as in a song.
> It is no song that conveys the feeling
> That there is no reason why it should ever stop,
> But the kindred form I am conscious of here
> Is the beginning and end of the world,
> The unsearchable masterpiece, the music of the spheres,
> Alpha and Omega, the Omnific Word.[17]
> These stones have the silence of supreme creative power ...
>
> (C.P. I, pp.428-9)

[17] The quotation is from the Revelation of St. John the Divine, 1: 7, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord".

The "direct and undisturbed way of working" that is the nature of stone, makes a mockery of all human endeavour. Yet, stones also offer in their stance of "Spartan impassivity", an image of survival in this "frenzied and chaotic age". The stones are a constant centre which represents "foundations firm and invariable" and suggest that man's task is also to be as solid and impassive as stone, "Essential to the world, inseparable from it". But this task of establishing a new foundation for human culture, cannot, it is insisted, be achieved by "surrender to the crowd", for the lessons the stones teach is that the individual must learn to be separate in his "truth", realizing his own uniqueness even as the stones of the beach do.

To emphasize the need for new beginnings, the opening line of the poem is repeated, "All is lithogenesis - or lochia", and suggests that new stages in perception and understanding will only develop from a realigning of human significance in relation to the facts the stones present. But objections to the wholesale adoption of such a stance are anticipated, "You may say that the truth cannot be crushed out". If seeing the stones as a repository of truth is thought to be impossible, if it is believed that no matter what occurs, truth will "braird", sprout again from the earth, like a plant in the spring through unexpected openings, the answer is to "look over this beach" and see if it supports that kind of life form. Where on this beach, it is asked, is there a "crop confirming any credulities?" What "fescue", what teacher's straw pointer, can instruct in this lesson? "Truth is not crushed;/It crushes, gorgonizes all else into itself". Truth is not to be exclusively adapted to the human view of the universe; truth arises out of inanimate matter, bringing everything back to the likeness of stone. But how, it is asked, is such a truth to be known. The answer comes back, "Do not argue with me. Argue with these stones", for they alone are the "inoppugnable reality".

Belief itself, it is suggested, will be regenerated from the stones. Too often, men look at the universe and think that what they see is the aim and end of life, even "As romanticists viewed the philistinism of their day/As final", even as "all thinkers and writers" have interpreted "the indifference of the masses of mankind" as a natural state. Compared to the stones, "all human culture is a Goliath to fall", but even so, the "supreme serenity" of this rocky wilderness puts the idea of human purpose into appropriate relation. The stone beach is like Doughty's desert, a place where it is possible to apprehend reality without the trappings of civilization. The "barren but beautiful reality" is experienced at first hand, even as Doughty had come to a new understanding through his "seeing of a hungry man".

All of the achievements of civilization, even all of literature, it is insisted, have not been able to establish a truly human culture, for the only way in which that can come to be is by finding a way of releasing human potential. Gripping a stone in his hand, he defiantly states, here is "The humanity no culture has reached, the mob,/Intelligentsia, our impossible and imperative job". The future task will be to create a new civilization in which every man will have the right to develop.

In the penultimate stanza of the poem the question of belief is brought to the fore again, and this time the question centres on the miracle of the Resurrection,

> 'Ah! you say, 'if only one of these stones would move
> - Were it only an inch - of its own accord.
> This is the resurrection we await,
> -The stone rolled away from the tomb of the Lord.
> I know there is no weight in infinite space,
> No impermeability in infinite time,
> But it is as difficult to understand and have patience here
> As to know that the sublime
> Is theirs no less than ours, no less confined
> To men than men's to a few men, the stars of their kind'.
>
> (C.P. I, p.432)

The stones will not offer the reassuring proof of the Christian doctrine of immortality, for the finality of death has to be accepted. The anguish involved in facing death is the true redemptive act and leads to an understanding of existence which will ultimately prevent the majority of men living a "death-in-life".

> The poem ends as it began with a strange dense language,
>
> Diallage of the world's debate, end of the long auxesis,
> Although no ébrillade of Pegasus can here avail,
> I prefer your enchorial characters - the futhorc of the future -
> To the hieroglyphics of all the other forms of Nature.
> Song, your apprentice encrinite, seems to sweep
> The Heavens with a last entrochal movement;
> And with the same word that began it, closes
> Earth's vast epanadiplosis. (C.P. I, p.433)

The ending celebrates a vision of unity in which the poet symbolically releases song from the stones. The fragments of language which gave the encyclopaedic introduction to the geological universe at the beginning of the work, are here replaced by equally strange words, but ones which all have some kind of synthesizing function. The theoretical aspects of language are represented by rhetorical terms: "Diallage" is a figure of speech by which ideas, after having been considered from every possible point of view, are brought together into one conclusion, and as the word is also a mineral, suggests the connection between language and matter; "auxesis" is hyperbole, and here in the stone beach is a truth which will not brook exaggeration; "Epanadiplosis" is a sentence which begins and ends with the same word, as in the Biblical, "Rejoice again I say rejoice". Interwoven with these formal devices of language are words which suggest a definite materialness about language: "futhorc" is the Runic alphabet, which is known to present time because these were words cut out of stone; similarly, "enchorial characters" are found on the Rosetta stone. Both are preferred to the "hieroglyphics" (mystical, symbolic language) which apply more easily to the less intractable "forms of Nature". Song, which is the poet's gift and evidence of an imagination or consciousness which

will not be curtailed (no ébrillade of Pegasus will here avail"), is arising out of the stones. But this song is still in the process of being realized, it is an "apprentice" fossil or "encrinite", which can branch up to the heavens and unite itself with the great circular, wheel-like (entrochal) movement of the universe. In these final lines, song and stones and words and poet enter into a transcendental harmony, celebrating beginning and end in a material universe where significance is found by joyously embracing the condition of life as it is.

The great rhetorical debate which is the poem itself, as well as ideas about the fundamental nature of existence, has come full circle. From a confrontation with the impenetrability of the inanimate universe, the understanding that has been gained is that there does exist some form of harmony. But it is a hard won victory, which convinces through the authenticity of the struggle to find a new faith.

In terms of its breadth of knowledge and imagination, as well as its exploration of language as matter in itself, there is nothing in modern poetry with which to compare On a Raised Beach; it is original. There are parts of the work which are raw, clumsy and unpolished, but even this kind of cragginess is complementary to the poetic statement. A work which presented itself as a complete and enclosed order, would not have been true to the meaning of a poem which had as its aim the realigning of consciousness through the experience of the tragic nature of existence. MacDiarmid in confronting his rough and barren reality matched subject with form.

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CONCLUSION

Inevitably when an attempt is made to examine the uniqueness of an artist's achievement, a study will begin by fixing on those qualities which seem innovatory in his work, and end by asserting his links with the traditional. So it is with MacDiarmid. The daring images and startling perspectives of his early work ferment in an environment in which the ballad, a poetic form which pre-dates the written word, was still a living entity. Fed on a poetry which belongs more in the realm of primitive instinct than rarified modern reason, MacDiarmid, using the rhythms of speech which were part of his way of life, built on this foundation and at the same time expanded the old boundaries to incorporate the feel of the modern world.

Similarly, while MacDiarmid's imagination stretched out to include all that was new in thought and understanding in poetry, his critical attitudes were drawn primarily from the classical/humanist tradition, from the works of Arnold and from Arnold's early modern apologist, Orage. Even MacDiarmid's political activities, radical as they were, were built on the ideals of the Victorian reformers who were the pre-cursors of Socialism. MacDiarmid became part of the early Socialist movement which was to alter significantly the fabric of society in Britain and he also led the drive for political independence in Scotland. MacDiarmid's political ideals, however, belong, not to the dictates of party or cause, but to the need to find a more worthy way of living, one in which "breid and butter problems" would disappear and the spiritual side of life wound find room for free development.

The difficulty of living in a world deprived of a unifying religious belief was felt most acutely by MacDiarmid. Unable to find in either the dissenting religion of his parents or in the more universal faith of the Catholic church, an informing vision, he was left to look for some

kind of substitute. In an age in which esoteric movements were almost the norm, MacDiarmid was not entirely unaffected by their attractions, and out of that arose his interest in Soloviev. Soloviev's philosophy offered a way of combining the ever-developing knowledge of science into an holistic scheme, and while that fusion of the material and spiritual had a strong cabbalistic element, MacDiarmid was saved from the extremes of mysticism, to which so many of his contemporaries fell prey, by a tough-mindedness in his character which demanded direct contact with concrete reality.

This insistence upon locating meaning within the natural and physical world led MacDiarmid to interpret reality as fundamentally tragic. Stated most powerfully in On a Raised Beach, this view demanded that life be seen as a material reality in which consciousness itself had evolved, and was still evolving, out of matter, a conception which dismissed the idea of a higher informing spirit in life or any notion of man as centre of the universe. This stripping away of cherished illusions was an act of great courage and integrity on MacDiarmid's part and in refusing to accept any easier course, either by reverting to Christian orthodoxy as Eliot did, or, like Yeats, by creating a private system of symbols, he stands alone in modern poetry.

Asserting that life has significance, even when the purpose and destiny of the human order is recognized as being forever beyond understanding, may seem hopeless to an age all too accustomed to Existentialist despair. Yet, whatever its shortcomings and limitations, MacDiarmid's vision did not sell out the future.

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APPENDIX 'A'

The Fair Copy Manuscript of 'On a Raised Beach'

This version of On a Raised Beach was included in a collection of letters from MacDiarmid to Francis George Scott which is now in the possession of Edinburgh University Library. The letters are dated from 1932 to 1941, but the collection is incomplete because Scott destroyed many of MacDiarmid's letters after he became estranged from the poet. There is no accompanying letter with the manuscript to give any indication of when this version was written or explain the differences between the two versions.

The most striking difference between the two is that the fair copy does not include the opening and closing stanzas of the published version, but begins with the second stanza, "Deep conviction or preference can seldom/Find direct terms in which to express itself" and closes with a verse which is absent from the other. The final stanza of the fair copy manuscript reads,

But I cannot sit here till I am
Like one of these stones even if I want to,
I have not the will-power.
   The best I can do
Is to make my verses as bare, as rough.
So now I rise. Yet I am strangely not strangely at peace,
And do not feel as if I walked on difficult stuff.
I tread with contentment and ease,
And not at all like Monsieur Edmond Teste
Who knew the devil in him throve as long
   As he kept to level ground
So he took to scrambling among
The rocks and compelled his mind
To pay more attention to directing his hands and feet
Than to his impossible thoughts - I find
No such relief, and need none,
                Nor compete
Any longer with the stones as if we were not one.

There is also some internal reorganization between the two versions resulting in differences in line sequences, and there is another passage in the fair copy which although excluded from the published version appears in "Towards a New Scotland", which is also in the Stony Limits anthology,

> Even as the hills of Morven were hills before
> The Himalayas or Alps, or Andes were born
> And, confirmed in their range through all geological time,
> Can look on these mighty upstarts with scorn,
> Saying: 'we saw you come and we'll see you go,
> No matter how you may tower today'
> - Even as old Scotland ~~can~~ at all these giantisms
> Of England and Empire can look in the same way -
> So I feel these stones looking at me
> And through me at all human achievement
> But if they spoke as I have imagined the hills
> Of Morven doing I would be content;
> I cannot imagine their unspoken criticism.
> Each of them swallows all thought in an endless abysm.

There is an important difference in one word on page two of the fair copy. The word is "Physiological" in line fourteen. In all published versions of On a Raised Beach this reads "Psychological", but as the immediately preceding line refers to "the bodies of animals" and as the point of the whole passage is to refer to physical change, "Physiological" would seem the more appropriate reading. Similarly, on page four of the fair copy, in the catalogue of Norn words, "kollyarun" is given, while in all other versions it is "kollyarum". The first is the correct form. Again, in the published version there is a comma between "millya" and hellya" which is absent from the fair copy, and as "millya hellya" means "between the smooth rocks", the comma is superfluous.

The major poetic difference between the two versions is that the fair copy seems much more of a personal statement and lacks the sense of distancing which is the achievement of the published version,

consequently, the extraordinary sense of breadth, the encyclopaedic knowledge of stone and the search for significance in relation to inanimate matter, is not so acutely realized. In the fair copy there is also a more overt concern with trying to find the right language to express the nature of the stone beach. This search begins with "How can language seize the life of a bird/In its buoyancy, volatility, sharp responsiveness ..." and continues after the passage in Norn with the lines, "Even the Norn will not serve me over this hurdifell/No other language can, I know full well", and again, "The problem of a limited vocabulary/Besets one first, and seemed, allied to that/The difficulty of seeing anything/In accordance with what science has taught". Much less is made of the picture provided by physics of the material nature of the geological earth as dynamic substance and there is also less technological language used in the fair copy version.

There is a strong didactic quality in the fair copy which comes through most clearly in the following passage, which is not included in the published version,

> Just as in economics now we can dispense
> With the drudgery of most folk
> - Human labour is needed no longer
> But to most people there is nothing else to have and give
> And unless they can suddenly be made infinitely stronger
> To endure leisure and plenty they will be unable to live -
> So all but all culture is unnecessary work,
> And means no more to human destiny than to these stones,
> - False beliefs, vain imaginings, mere rationalisations
> instead of creative thought.

The association between the muteness of the stones and the unheard masses of humanity is not made to the same degree in the fair copy, so that lines like the above seem extraneous.

On the whole, the fair copy is an inferior version of the poem,

for it lacks the creative tension of the published piece and there is no sense of a final synthesis in its ending. The fair copy is, however, an interesting and instructive contrast which provides a yardstick for measuring this major poem in relation to MacDiarmid's own capacities.

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On a Raised Beach.

Deep conviction or preference can seldom
Find direct terms in which to express itself.
I am profoundly moved
Today on this shingle shelf.
I understand this pensive reluctance so well,
This not discommendable obstinacy,
These contrivances of an inexpressive critical feeling,
These stones with their resolve that Creation shall not be
Injured by iconoclasts and quacks. Nothing has stirred
Since I lay down this morning an eternity ago
So far as I have seen but one bird,
But that is still more difficult to know.
Let me begin with these stones as the world began.
Will I come to a bird quicker than the world's course ran,
To a bird, then to myself, a man?
Iconoclasts, quacks. So these stones have dismissed
All but all of evolution, unmoved by it,
As the essential life of mankind in the mass
Is the same as their earliest ancestors' yet.

P. T.O.

actual physical conflict or psychological warfare
incidental to love or food
Brings out animal life's boldest and most brilliant patterns
Concealed as a rule in habitude,
There is a sudden revelation of colour,
The protrusion of a crest,
The expansion of an ornament,
— But no general principle can be guessed —
From these flashing fragments of bee seeing,
These foambells on the hidden currents of being.
The bodies of animals are visible substances
And must therefore have colour and shape, in the first place
Depending on chemical composition, physical structure,
mode of growth,
Physiological rhythms, and other factors in the case.
But their purposive significance is another question.
Brilliant-hued animals live away in the ocean depths;
The mole has a rich sexual colouring in the season
under the ground; nearly every beast keeps
livelier colours inside it than outside.
What the seen shows is never anything to what it's
designed to hide.
The red blood that makes the beauty of a maiden's
cheek
Has red made a gorilla's pigmented and hairy face.

Let us come to no hasty conclusions as we seek
The truth of this seemingly silent and sterile place.
Varied forms and functions through life may seem to have shown
They all soon come back to the likeness of stone.
In the intervening stages we can best find a clue
In what we all come from and return to.

I was glad when the bird flew away.
I hope it will not come again.
Birds are most themselves
In fleeting moments, like men.
How can language seize the life of a bird
In its buoyancy, volatility, sharp responsiveness,
Expressing itself immediately in rhythm, gesture, song?
I could almost as easily express
My own life. The inward gates of a bird
Are always open, it does not know how to shut them;
But whether any man's are open is doubtful.
I look at these stones but know little about them
But I feel that their gates are open too,
Always open, far longer open, than any bird's can be,
That every one of them has had its gate wide open for hours
Than all birds put together, let alone humanity, —
Through through them no man can see;
No man, nor anything more decently from them
themselves
And that is everything else on the Earth.

PTO

4

I too lapsing here have dismissed all else;
Bread from stones is my sole and desperate dearth;
From stones, which are to the Earth as to the sunlight
To the naked sun which is for no man's sight.

Ratchel, striae, relationships of tesserae,
Innumerable shades of grey,
Innumerable shapes; I try them
With the old Shetland words — hroun,
Duss, stonis, quoedarons, skollyaren;
They lay my words in kolgref,
They thwart from me all ways,
Klett, millya shellya, shellyina evetta,
Hellyina wheeda, shellyina grit, bakka, ayre,
— Even the Norn will not serve me over this knodifell;
No other language can, I know full well;
— And yet there are fools who ask why I string
Such words together! They are the fools
Who would have no uncultivable land,
No wild moors and bogs and barren foreshore,
— Not knowing that without wilderness and desert
The world would be a worse wilderness yet.
I pile these words together as Nature piles a ruined beach
But they are not meaningless. They are carefully chosen and apt.
Dictionaries are open to all; but these words are
not easily cupped.

5

85

A mind as clear as crystal may want to say
Things complicated as crystallography's laws,
And ~~obviously~~ a poem about a stone
Reveals its subject from that cause.
It is impossible that a poet should be
Content to deal with it superficially.
The problem of a limited vocabulary
Besets one first; and second, allied to that,
The difficulty of seeing anything
In accordance with what science has taught.
Most men see a stone as solid still although
Porous as the solar system we have
A message rocking gracefully on earth's top
It hardly to be expected here.
These stones demand a gangway to God.
Their sullenness is their despair, their fear
That we shall still further betray ourselves and them.
They have good cause. Consciousness has let them down
Further and further since the dawn of time
Till to our blasphemous minds they have grown
Counterfeits of the unchangeable — the same,
Yesterday, today, forever, a million years
A moment to them. What are our minds for them?
What futile ephemeras all life to them appears!
Are not these medals of creation, stones,
The world's first born, the "least of these" to us?

PTO

6

we have betrayed ourselves betraying them.
Yet still as I lie and ponder them
I feel them leaping against hope — I feel them vie
To reach me harder than to reach them I can try;
The inaccessibility, the lack of response, is mine.
Behind the dullness, the silence, denial and despair
I impute to them, deep in the heart of each stone there,
I see the unconquerable hope, the light of lights divine.
What are our minds if we cannot help them?
Shall we confine ourselves to minor cases?
Be legs to the halt, eyes to the less blind, voice to the less dumb,
But leave these stones, blind, dumb, moveless, in their places?

Even as the hills of Morven were hills before
The Himalayas or Alpes or Andes were born
and, confirmed in their range through all geological time,
Can look on these mighty upstarts with scorn,
Saying: "We saw you come and we'll see you go,
To-morrow how you may tower today"
— Even as old Scotland at all the giantisms
Of England and Empire can look in the same way —
So I feel these stones looking at me
And through me at all human achievement —
But if they spoke as I have imagined the hills

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Of Mowen doing I must be content;
I cannot imagine their unspoken criticism.
Each of them swallows all thought in an endless abyss.
As romanticists viewed the Philistinism of their days
(Nay as all thinkers and writers find
The indifference of the masses of mankind)
As final and were prone to set one against it
Infinite longing rather than manly will
So are most men with any stone yet
– Even those who juggle with the lapidary's, architect's, geologist's words again
And all their diverse knowledges of stones in vain
Tho' these stones have far more difference in colour, shape, size
Than most men have to my eyes!
– Even those who develop precise conceptions to immense distances
Out of these bleak surfaces!
All human culture is a Goliath to fall
To the least of these pebbles with Al.

I am enamoured of the desert at last.
A culture demands leisure and leisure presupposes
A self-determined rhythm of life; the capacity for solitude
Is its test; by that the desert knows us.
It is not a question of escaping from life
But the reverse — a question of acquiring the power
To exercise the loneliness, the independence, of stones,
And that only comes from knowing that one

PTO

6

Function remains as fundamental to life as ever
However we may seem cut off from all other affairs,
We have lost the grounds of our being,
We have not built on rock.
Just as in economics now we can dispense
With the drudgery of most folk
— Human labour is needed no longer
But to most people there is nothing else to have and live
And unless they can suddenly be made infinitely stronger
To endure leisure and plenty they will be unable to live —
So all but all culture is unnecessary work,
And means no more to human destiny than to their strug
— False beliefs, vain imaginings, mere rationalisations
instead of creative thought.
(It will be ever increasingly necessary to find
In the interests of all mankind
Men capable of rejecting all that all other men
Think — as a stone remains
Essential to the world, inseparable from it,
And yet rejects all other life yet,
(Great work cannot be combined with surrender to the
crowd,
— Nay, the truth for which men seek is as free
From all they have thought as a stone from humanity!)
Thinking of all the higher zones
Confronting the spirit of man I know they are bare
Of all so-called culture as any stone here;

9

Not so much of all literature survives
As any wisp of scrota that thrives
On a rock (interesting though it may seem to be
As de Bary's and Schwendener's discovery
Of the dual nature of lichens, the partnership,
Symbiosis, of a particular fungus and particular alga)
These bare stones bring me straight back to reality.
I grasp one of them and I have in my grip
The beginning and end of the world, my own self, and as
before I never saw
The empty hand of my brother, Man,
The humanity no culture has reached, the mob
— Intelligentsia, our impossible and impotent job.

Ah! if only one of these stones would move
Were it only an inch — of its own accord,
This is the resurrection we await
— The stone rolled away from the mouth of the tomb.
I know there is no weight in infinite space,
No impermeability in infinite time,
But it is as difficult to understand and have patience here
As it is to know that the sublime
Is theirs no less than ours; no less confined
To men than men's to a few men, the stars of their kind.
The masses too have begged bread from stones,

P TO

10

From human stones,
And only get it, not from their fellow-men,
But from stones such as these — if these!
Detached intellectuals, it is not
The reality of life that is hard to know.
It is nearest of all and easiest to grasp,
But you must participate in it to proclaim it.
I lift a stone: it is the meaning of life I clasp
Which is death, for that is the meaning of death;
How else can any man yet participate
In the life of a stone;
How else can any man yet become
Supremely at one with creation, supremely alone?
— Told as the stone that covers him he lies dumb,
And the stone at the mouth of her grave is not wetheron,
Each of these stones on this crowded beach,
Every stone in the world,
Covers infinite death — beyond the reach
Of the dead it hides; and cannot be hurled
Aside yet to let any of them come forth, as love
(Though I do not depend on that to prove
My case) once made a stone move.
So let us beware of death; the stones will have
Their revenge; we have lost all approach to them;

11

But soon we shall become as those we have betrayed
And they will seal us as fast in our graves
As our indifference and ignorance seals them.
But let us not be afraid to die.
The heavier and colder and quieter them,
The more motionless do stones lie,
In death than in life to all men.
It is no more difficult in death than here
(Though slow as the stones the powers develop
To arise from the grave) to get a life worth having
Out in death — unlike life — we lose nothing that is
really ours.

But I cannot sit here till I am
Like one of these stones even if I want to.
I have not the will-power,
The best I can do
Is to make my verses as bare, as rough.
So now I rise. Yet I am strangely not strangely at peace,
And do not feel as if I walked on difficult stuff.
I tread with contentment and ease,
And not at all like Monsieur Edmond Teste
Who knew the devil in him throve as long
As he kept to level ground
So he took to scrambling among

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12

The rocks and compelled his mind
To pay more attention to directing his hands and feet
Than to his impossible thoughts — I find
No such relief, and need none,
Nor compete
Any longer with the stones as if we were not one.

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